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# FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES OF BOYS **WEEKLY.** WHO MAKE MONEY.

## A CASTAWAY'S FORTUNE, OR, THE HUNT FOR A PIRATE'S GOLD.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Dick, wrapped completely in the folds of the python, gave himself up for lost. At that moment Joe, followed by Ben, appeared at the opening. Taking in the situation, he pulled out his revolver and fired at the serpent's head.

# Fame and Fortune Weekly

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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## A CASTAWAY'S FORTUNE

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## THE HUNT FOR A PIRATE'S GOLD

By A SELF-MADE MAN

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE YOUNG CASTAWAY.

"There's the sun at last, thank goodness. I never thought I'd see it rise again. And yet will I be any better off in the daylight, afloat as I am, a mere speck on the ocean, on this bit of a wreck—the last of the old bark Polly?"

Thus spoke Dick Danvers, a plucky young American sailor, and the only survivor of the ill-fated bark Polly, eighty days out from San Francisco, bound for Sydney, N. S. W., Australia, which had foundered the night before during a short-lived but fierce gale in the South Pacific Ocean.

Though the storm had blown itself out, the waves ran high and were covered with yeasty foam.

One moment the bit of wreck, to which the boy had lashed himself just before the vessel went down, rose high on their crests, and the next moment it sank out of sight between the surges.

All unknown to the sailor boy the broken spar was steadily drifting toward a lone island, surrounded apparently on all sides by coral reefs, against which the turbulent waves spent their force.

There seemed to be no hope for the lad if he was driven on those sharp barriers of coral.

And yet Providence, that notes the fall of even a sparrow, was guiding the spar, with its living burden, straight for the solitary opening in those reefs—a passage scarcely more than a dozen feet wide, through which the sea poured in

tumultuous confusion and then united with the comparatively smooth water that intervened between the circling reefs and the island itself.

Dick Danvers was well-nigh exhausted by the long hours of buffeting he had undergone from the wind and waves throughout the night, and only that he had taken the precaution of lashing himself to the spar when he realized that the bark was sinking under him, he would long since have been washed off that bit of flotsam to his death.

As morning grew apace, and the sun rose in a comparatively cloudless sky, its beams warmed the boy into new life.

At length, as the spar rose on the summit of a wave, he raised himself as far as the rope permitted him and gazed around upon the boundless expanse of agitated waters.

Then it was he saw the island not a great way off, and for the first time in hours a thrill of hope sent the warm blood tingling through his veins.

"Hurrah! An island! I shall be saved after all!" he cried in husky and uncertain tones, as his eyes took in a fleeting glimpse of the tree-dotted land.

Then the spar sank with him into a watery valley and the exhilarating sight disappeared.

But the spar was up again in a few moments, and once again the island was in full view.

He saw that he was driving straight for it and he uttered another glad cry.

The next time the spar came up he saw the barrier of reefs, with the sea breaking fiercely upon them, and then

his heart sank again, for his experience told him that death lay in wait there for the helpless, storm-tossed victim of the sea's fury.

The moments flew by and he saw himself drawing nearer and nearer to that fearful barrier of foam-tossed water through which the coral raised its snow-white outlines.

The narrow channel was not yet perceptible to his eyes, and the boy thought he saw his finish in actual sight of safety.

At length he was so close he could hear the roar of the waves as they broke.

His span of life seemed now reduced to minutes.

He closed his eyes and began to pray, for he believed in a hereafter, and did not want to enter the presence of his Maker without some slight preparation.

The roar increased.

The turmoil of the water was all around him.

Then the wild idea occurred to him that he had better cut himself loose.

The spar was bound to grind him between itself and the reef if he remained attached to it.

If he were free to leave it just as it struck he might be washed over the reef and possibly escape, even half-dead, to the shore.

He reached for his case-knife attached to the narrow belt that every sailor wears.

Drawing it he slashed at the ropes and soon freed his limbs.

Returning the knife to its sheath, he clung to the spar with both arms.

He was now right upon the reef.

As the spar rose with the next wave he looked to see how he should leap.

Then it was that for the first time he detected the narrow channel, and saw that the spar was about to pass through the barrier that way.

"Saved! Saved!" he ejaculated, almost overpowered by the revulsion of feeling.

Then the spar was whirled through the channel and was presently bobbing up and down on the smoother waters inside the reefs.

Fifteen minutes later it floated gently almost upon the hard, smooth, sandy shore.

Dick threw himself off his frail support and crawled tremblingly up on the beach a few yards, then rolled over quite exhausted in the warm sunshine.

He lay there a quarter of an hour without making a move.

By degrees his strength returned and at last he sat up and looked around.

The few garments he had on were almost dry by this time.

The air was warm and balmy, and a light breeze blew in from the ocean, gently rustling the brilliant green leaves at the apex of the tall, slender coconut palms that seemed to be plentifully distributed about the island.

When Dick stood up he could see groves of these trees in different spots within his range of vision, while the ground itself was covered with a thick carpet of emerald-tinted vegetation that looked particularly refreshing to the eye of the young castaway.

The boy had had but little to eat since the previous

noon, for the storm had engaged the attention of all hands soon after dinner, and by the time the evening meal was usually served by the bark's "doctor," the seas were running so high and the vessel rolling so violently that he couldn't use the stove, so the men had to content themselves with a cold bite, got as best they could.

Now that Dick felt safe for the present at least his appetite began to make itself felt.

Seeing bunches of cocoanuts hanging high up in their leafy coverts, he lost no time in shinning up the smooth stems and cutting several of the nuts loose, after ascertaining that they were full of their milky liquid.

Sliding down to the ground he seized one of the nuts, punctured a hole in one end with his knife and applied the orifice to his lips.

How sweet the milk tasted to the half-famished boy!

He drained the nut to its last drop, then cut it open and began chewing its succulent pulp.

He was willing to swear at that moment that it was the most delicious meal he had ever eaten.

A second nut was punctured and he finished the milk in that, too.

"Lord, but that tasted good!" he exclaimed with a sigh of satisfaction. "I begin to feel like a new chap altogether. With hundreds of palms all around me I guess I won't starve to death on this island, even if I have to remain here some time, which I hope won't be my fate, for I have no desire to play the role of Robinson Crusoe. Such a thing is nicer to read about than put into practice. If I hadn't read so many sea stories in my time I suppose I never would have run away to sea. I found by sad experience that the fine times boys have aboard ship in stories are a pure fiction. I shall never forget my first cruise if I live to be a hundred. I found myself up against it for fair, with no chance to run away for many, many weeks. More than once I felt as if it would be a satisfaction to jump overboard, and end my troubles for good and all. However, I pulled through, and now I've got used to sea life and the hard lot that goes with it; but still I don't see a whole lot in it, and I'm going to shake it as soon as I can connect with something better."

While Dick was speaking to himself he was walking slowly along the shore on a kind of exploring expedition.

He wanted to find out how big the island was first before he ventured far from the beach.

He knew he was on a coral island, and that these islands were of all shapes and sizes.

They owed their origin to a peculiar marine insect which in countless numbers built them up through ages from the bottom of the ocean.

Sometimes the work of the insect builders would seem to have been interrupted, and the coral speck reaching but to the level of the waves would be wholly unseen—a place of peril to some swiftly moving ship—save that a bunch of cocoa palms rose like plumed sentinels out of the sea to warn the mariner of the presence of the hidden reef.

Sometimes these islands were circular in form, inclosing a lagoon.

The fairy islet, covered with a circlet of palms, then looked like a green wreath borne on the sunlit waves, or a ring of emerald in its setting of gold, cast up from the treasures of the deep.

These kind were called atolls, and as the shore of this one seemed to have a steady curve, Dick fancied he was on one of them.

At any rate, it appeared to be a good-sized island, which had rested there for centuries, and the boy judged that nature had made ample provision in the food line at least for any number of castaways.

"I shall no doubt find shell-fish in abundance along the reefs, and it will be no difficult matter for me to swim out there and hunt for them," he mused as he strode along. "Of course I'll have to eat them raw, for I have no means of cooking them. This is where a magnifying glass would come in handy, for one could easily start a fire in dried brush by bringing the rays of the sun to a focus. However, I haven't got one, so what's the use of talking? The only thing I have is my knife, and that is invaluable."

Dick continued on for perhaps twenty minutes when he saw a break in the island right ahead.

That convinced him that his supposition about the island being a large atoll was correct.

The break was a channel connecting with a circular lake or lagoon.

The idea that the island contained other inhabitants than himself never struck him, so his surprise was great when, on rounding the point of the channel, he suddenly came face to face with a boy about his own age and a smooth-faced sailor.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE UNWELCOME INHABITANT.

It would be hard to decide which was the most surprised by the unexpected encounter—Dick Danvers or the other two.

Dick stopped short, with an exclamation on his lips, and so did the other boy and the sailor.

Both parties surveyed each other in silence for a moment or two and then the other boy stepped forward.

"Who are you, and where did you come from?" he asked eagerly.

"My name is Dick Danvers, and I came from the sea," replied Dick.

"Your vessel is near at hand, then?" said the boy, even more eagerly.

"No, it isn't. My vessel is down in Davy Jones's locker, or at the bottom of the ocean, I am sorry to say."

The boy's face fell, while his companion also looked disappointed.

"Then you've been shipwrecked on this island?"

"Not exactly. My vessel, the bark Polly, of San Francisco, foundered last night many miles from here. I came here lashed to a broken spar. I landed about an hour ago."

"Then you're as bad off as we are."

"So you two came ashore here also from a lost vessel?" said Dick.

"Our brig was wrecked on the reef yonder," said the boy, pointing. "Ben and I were the only ones who escaped."

"When did that happen?"

"About a month ago."

"What's your name?"

"Joe Deering. My companion is an A. B., named Ben Brace."

"Glad to make your acquaintance. Misery, you know, always likes company," laughed Dick.

His cheery manner and honest-looking face took with the other two and the three became good friends at once.

"The more the merrier, so long as they're the right sort," said Joe.

"I hope I shall prove the right sort," replied Dick.

"I'll bet you are. I've taken a fancy to you already."

"Are there more inhabitants on this island?"

"Not to our knowledge."

"You've been all over it, I suppose?"

"In a rough way we have."

"No wild animals on an atoll, I believe?"

"There's only one on this."

"One!"

"Yes, a boa constrictor."

"A what?" almost gasped Dick.

"A big snake about thirty feet long and as big round as Ben's thigh."

"Good Lord! How did that reptile get here? Never heard of such a thing being on a coral island."

"We brought it here."

"You did?"

"Our brig. We took it aboard at Batavia in Java, where we took in our cargo of rice, coffee, spices, vegetable oils, indigo, cocoa, and other merchandise too numerous to mention. It was put aboard in a big box. We were taking it to San Francisco, where we were bound. It was consigned to a circus, and was to be sent East by rail. As things have turned out, the public is not likely ever to see it."

"If you two were the only people saved of the brig's company, how in thunder did the serpent get ashore alive?"

"That's a mystery that Ben and I haven't been able to see through. It is certain it did get ashore, and we've been living in constant fear ever since we found the fact out."

"That's pleasant, I must say. I suppose the reptile is sneaking around in the vegetation somewhere. It's a good thing for me that I kept to the shore and did not start to investigate the interior."

"That's right," nodded Joe. "I should imagine his snakeship is pretty hungry by this time, and that he would consider you a choice morsel."

"Don't mention it," replied Dick with a disturbed look. "You give me the shivers. I never did like snakes even a little bit. How have you managed to escape from the reptile for a whole month?"

"By good luck, I suppose, and keeping our eyes skinned."

"What would you have done had it attacked you?"

"I should have tried to kill it with my revolver."

"Then you have a revolver?"

"I have," answered Joe, taking the weapon from his pocket and showing it to Dick. "It is fully loaded and ought to be a great help in case of an emergency."

"I don't believe you'd find it easy to kill a wide-awake ravenous snake the size you mentioned with a revolver," said Dick rather doubtfully.

"I'd do the best I could. A bullet or two in the head would put it out of business."

"The snake would hardly keep its head stationary long enough for you to get a good aim. You know how they act. They swing their necks to and fro when out for action."

"I know they do."

"If the snake got a coil or two around your arms and body you couldn't use your revolver, anyway."

"That's true, too. So Ben and I are constantly on the watch, night and day, to prevent that boa constrictor from stealing a march on us."

"The prospect of being obliged to remain on this island for a spell doesn't look so comfortable as it did before you told me about that snake," said Dick.

"It's better to know it's here than not, for now you'll be on your guard, too."

"It's bad enough to be wrecked here without being constantly on edge over the presence of a vicious reptile that may catch one unawares at any moment and make a meal of you," growled Dick with a nervous look around. "How often have you seen it?"

"Only once. A week after we got here."

"Did it go for you?"

"No. It gave a loud hiss and sneaked. But it wasn't so hungry then as it must be now."

"That's a cheerful reflection. Where are you hanging out?"

"In a small coral cavern a short distance from here."

"Is there room in it for me?"

"Sure. We keep a fire going at night outside the entrance."

"How do you make the fire?"

"We have plenty of matches."

"The dickens you have! Where did you get them?"

"From the wreck of the brig. We brought ashore a lot of stuff before she finally broke up the other day."

"Good enough."

"Yes. We saved a good many cases of canned goods and other ship stores, so our bill of fare is a good deal better than one would expect on this island."

"That's fine. Now if the snake were out of the way—"

"I suppose you think we'd be having the time of our lives," laughed Joe.

"You'd be well fixed, at any rate. I'm lucky to find you here. All I had since yesterday noon has been a couple of cocoanuts, and they tasted mighty good."

"I suppose you're hungry, then?"

"Not extremely so; but I wouldn't turn down a square meal if it was offered to me," laughed Dick.

"Ben and I were going for a mess of shell-fish for a change. If you don't mind waiting a little while, we'll give you a royal spread for dinner."

"I'll wait, though your suggestion of a royal spread is making my mouth water already."

"Well, come along. We can talk as we go along," said Joe, linking his arm into Dick's.

The two boys started off like old chums, with Ben in the lead.

Down the beach they went in the direction Dick had come till they came abreast of a mass of coral that began near the water's edge and projected outward about a dozen yards.

"Here's where we get our shell-fish," said Joe. "There's loads of them above water at low tide."

Dick picked his way out with Deering and the sailor, and the three were presently gathering a supply of the bivalves, which they wrapped up in seaweed to keep moist.

When they had secured all that they could conveniently carry they turned back toward the lagoon.

"This is as good as a picnic, don't you think?" said Joe.

"Yes, if it wasn't for that snake," replied Dick, who couldn't get the boa constrictor out of his mind.

"Oh, never mind about the snake. There are three of us now and it will be easier to watch for it."

"I hope so; but if it gets desperately hungry there is no saying what it'll do when it sees three square meals in sight."

"I wish it was out of the way so we could explore this island thoroughly. Ben and I have been considering about doing it anyway and taking our chances."

"I should advise you to go slow. I don't believe in looking for trouble."

"There's our cave yonder," said Joe, pointing out an opening in a wall of coral.

A closer inspection of the cave showed that Joe and his companion had barricaded the greater part of the entrance with boxes, some of them empty, but the larger portion full of canned provisions.

A fire at night, however, was regarded as a surer protection against the prowling reptile.

Ben Brace lighted a fire right away, and when it burned to a mass of live coals the shell-fish were buried in the hot embers and soon cooked to a turn.

While the sailor was attending to this business the two boys got out some of the canned goods and a box of crackers.

A hearty meal was then made, which was washed down with cocoanut juice.

They had finished their dinner and were sitting back in the shade of the opening, when suddenly a long, sinuous object appeared dangling in front of the cave.

Its reared head darted about a foot into the place near the roof, and a pair of beady eyes seemed to search out every nook and corner.

The sailor and the boys, with exclamations of consternation, scrambled to their feet and retired behind the barricade.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A GREWSOME DISCOVERY.

The snake looked as if it meant business, and Joe drew his revolver.

Brace picked up a stout club and prepared to lend a helping hand.

Dick looked startled when he saw the ugly, flat-shaped head investigating the entrance to the cave, as if figuring on some mode of attack.

The sunlight glistened on its striped scales, reflecting a kind of prismatic luster.

"The blamed reptile has got us spotted now," said Dick. "It may stand guard out there and hold us prisoners. That would be a nice pickle for us."

He picked up a can that had been emptied at dinner, filled it full of coral dust and sand, and then taking aim flung it at the serpent's head.

His aim was true, and the loaded can struck its mark.

With an angry hiss the snake disappeared.

"A cheap but effective way of getting rid of undesirable visitors," laughed Joe.

Ben walked cautiously to the entrance and looked out, casting his eyes upward.

The boa constrictor had disappeared into the vegetation around the cave.

"It's gone," said the sailor.

The boys then ventured outside.

"It gave us something of a scare," said Dick.

"Rather; but you settled its hash, for the time being, at any rate," replied Joe.

"It knows where we are now and may try to sneak in after dark to get one of us," said Dick, with an uncomfortable look.

"Oh, the fire will keep it away," answered Joe confidently.

"You can't be certain of that. We ought to stand watch in turn."

"Of course. That's the way Ben and I have been doing for the past three weeks. In fact, we've been doing most of our sleeping in the daytime."

"Isn't there some way that we could get the best of that reptile?"

"Ben and I would be glad to know of some way, wouldn't we, Ben?"

"I reckon we would," replied the sailor.

"We might set some kind of a trap," suggested Dick.

"What kind?"

"That's what we must figure out. We've got plenty of rope here. If we could rig a noose and catch its head in it, that would give us a chance to kill it."

"Where would you put the noose?"

"Hang it in front of the entrance, and let it dangle from a block fixed in the roof. If the snake poked its head through the loop we would pull on the rope and jam its head up against the block. Then we'd have it dead to rights."

"Your scheme isn't a bad one if the snake would do its part toward making it a success; but the chances are against it."

"It's worth trying, isn't it?"

"What do you think, Ben?" asked Joe.

The sailor thought the experiment rather a dubious one, but said there was no harm in trying it if there was any way of rigging the pulley to the roof.

The only feasible way of accomplishing this was to attach the pulley to a long piece of rope and tie the end of the rope to a projecting piece of coral on the top of the cave outside.

This was done, and the pulley hung down a foot below the line of the roof.

Another long line, with a slip noose, was rove through the pulley, and the slack end carried behind the barricade.

That completed the trap, but the trio were not very sanguine as to results.

"What will we do now?" asked Joe.

"Let's walk around the beach of the lagoon," suggested Dick, "and circumnavigate the island along the shore."

"Ben and I have done that. There is nothing to see but the ocean on one side and vegetation and palm trees on the other," replied Joe. "However, I'm willing to make the trip again for your benefit. Ben needn't come unless he wants to."

The sailor said he'd rather go than remain behind, so the party started.

The lagoon was about half a mile around, and the tide being low they had a wide expanse of beach to walk upon.

It was almost a perfect circle, broken only at the point where the channel pierced it.

This channel was about sixty feet wide.

When the party had gone entirely around it they came out on the shore of the island and followed that.

"What's that?" asked Dick, after they had gone a short distance.

The others looked where Dick pointed and saw the top of a kind of hut showing through a thick grove of palm trees.

"Looks like a hut, doesn't it?" said Joe. "We didn't notice it when we passed this way on our tour of investigation."

"Let's got and take a look at it," suggested Dick.

Joe and the sailor agreed. So they made their way into the grove.

The hut proved to be a make-shift affair, constructed of pieces of ship timbers, roofed over with palm leaves and dried vegetation.

It looked as if it had been there a great many years.

A door, hanging by one leather hinge, was almost shut.

"Somebody was shipwrecked here long before us," said Joe; "but they evidently got away eventually. Let us hope we will pretty soon."

"He wasn't much of a carpenter, that's certain," said Brace, as they stood gazing at the rude habitation.

"What's the difference if the shack kept off the weather?" replied Dick.

"It isn't as good as our cave," said Joe. "The chap evidently didn't know about the cave or he wouldn't have gone to the trouble of building this."

"I don't see how he could have been on the island a great while without finding the cave," said Dick.

"Probably he built the hut before he found the cave."

"How do you know there was only one chap? There might have been two or three, or even more," put in Brace.

"The hut isn't large enough to hold more than one man comfortably," replied Dick.

As he spoke he walked to the door and pushed against it.

It moved only a few inches, when an obstacle prevented it from going any further.

Dick shoved on it and gradually it moved back.

Finally he got the door open far enough to admit his head, and he looked in.

"What do you see?" asked Joe, behind him.

Dick didn't see much at first.

He saw that it was the end of a small sea-chest that held the door.

It was an old-fashioned chest, too.

By degrees he made out other objects—some canvas that

was rotting away, a small keg against one of the walls, various other marine odds and ends in a state of decay, and finally a rude bunk of dry vegetable substance, on which lay the outline of what appeared to be a man.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Dick.

"What's the matter? The snake ain't in there, is it?" asked Joe.

"No," replied Dick, drawing out his head; "there's a man."

"A man!" exclaimed Joe.

"A dead one, I should judge."

"A corpse!"

"Take a squint yourself."

Joe did so.

"By George! You're right," he said after a look. "Here, Ben, put your shoulder against the door and shove it in. It's too much for me."

The sailor complied, but it was a hard job to get the door even half-way open.

The space, however, was wide enough for them to enter, and they did in Indian file.

They advanced gingerly toward the couch and looked down at the dead man.

Then they discovered that little else than a skeleton, covered with moldering garments, remained of the castaway.

"He turned up his toes a good many years ago," said the sailor. "I should say all of twenty at least. It takes time to put a chap in that state."

"That would show that whoever visited the island since did not discover him; else I should think he would have been buried," replied Dick. "That will have to be our duty."

"I don't fancy the job," said Joe. "Besides, we haven't a shovel."

"We'll manage somehow to make a hole deep enough to put him in."

"What's the matter with shutting the door and leaving him here? This hut has been his tomb so long that it oughtn't to make any difference if he stays here a few years more. In the end he'll crumble away, anyhow. If I was a corpse I think I'd rather be above the ground than under it."

"Well, let's take a look into the chest and see if we can find out what the man was," said Dick.

Joe agreed to that, so he and Dick hauled the chest away from the door, and then pushed the door wide open so they could get light.

The chest was locked and the key missing.

"The key must be in his clothes or around his body," said Dick.

"It will stay there, then," answered Joe. "I'm not going to monkey with that skeleton. We can smash in the cover with a piece of coral, or we can come here to-morrow with a hammer and chisel. There's no hurry. I don't believe there's anything in it but clothes, which can't amount to a whole lot."

So it was agreed to defer the examination of the chest until the following day, and accordingly the party left the hut and continued on their way around the island.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WHAT DICK FOUND IN THE DEAD MAN'S SEA-CHEST.

They made the entire circuit of the island, and finally returned to the cave and sat down on the beach away from the entrance, for they did not propose to let the boa constrictor, if it was in the neighborhood, steal on them unawares over the roof of their habitation.

"I suppose no vessel has come within signaling distance of this island while you have been here?" said Dick.

"Not to our knowledge," replied Joe. "Of course several vessels may have passed close to the reef on the opposite side and we couldn't have known about it. At any rate, we haven't seen any chance to get away from here."

"If this island isn't in the regular track of vessels we're likely to stay here some time."

"I'm afraid you're right; but Ben and I are in hopes that a vessel will show up soon close enough to be signaled."

"A vessel can't come any too quick to suit me," said Dick. "If it wasn't for the presence of that snake I wouldn't mind staying here a month or so, for the island seems to be a regular paradise."

"I agree with you, Danvers. This is a bang-up place to lay off and take the world easy; but that blamed snake certainly alters the situation a whole lot."

The conversation gradually veered around to other subjects, and when sundown came a fire was lighted, the balance of the shell-fish was cooked, and the trio sat down to their evening meal.

They cast lots to see who would stand the first four hours watch, and Dick got the short end, which entitled him to that honor.

Joe and Ben turned in on their soft grassy bunks at the back of the cave, while Dick took up his post at the entrance of the barricade.

It was part of his duty to keep the fire going during his watch, a plentiful supply of fuel having been gathered for that purpose.

A clock which Joe had brought ashore from the wreck of the brig enabled Dick to keep track of the time.

Nothing happened to alarm him during the four hours he watched, and at midnight he aroused Joe to take his place.

Then he tumbled in on Deering's bunk and was soon asleep.

It was a little after six when he awoke, and the sun was shining brightly into the mouth of the cave.

Ben Brace was on watch and Joe was sleeping on the opposite bunk.

The sailor had a pot of water suspended over a small blaze, and was waiting for it to boil.

"What are you going to use the water for, Brace?" asked Dick.

"To make a pot of coffee for breakfast," was the reply.

"You've got coffee, have you? Say, what haven't you got?"

"Oh, there are quite a number of things we haven't got. Money for one thing."

"Money wouldn't do you any good here."

"No, but I don't expect to remain here the rest of my

life, like that poor chap in the hut. When I get back to civilization once more I shall be strapped, which isn't a cheerful reflection."

"There'll be wages due you from the owners of your brig, won't there?"

"Yes, but what's comin' to me don't amount to a great deal. I'll have to ship again right away or go on my uppers. After the experience I've had this last voyage I'm not stuck on goin' to sea again in a hurry if I could help myself."

"I don't blame you. I feel the same way myself. I couldn't come nearer connecting with the next world and miss it than I did the night before last," replied Dick soberly, as he thought of his narrow escape.

After some more talk Dick asked Brace if it was safe to take a swim in the lagoon.

"We do it every mornin' and afternoon, as a rule," replied the sailor. "We haven't seen anythin' that looked like a shark since we came here."

Accordingly Dick peeled off his clothes and plunged in.

After splashing around for a while in the channel he swam across to the other side and landed.

Then he started along the shore, his destination being the hut in the cocoanut palm grove.

He found things as they had left them, and paying no attention to the skeleton he looked the place over.

He found nothing worth carrying away.

Before leaving he took another look at the bony remains. Then it was he saw a rusty key lying beside the couch.

"Maybe this is the key to the chest," he said to himself.

He cleaned it as well as he could and then inserted it in the lock.

It fitted, and though it worked with difficulty he managed to unlock the chest.

Throwing up the cover, a lot of woolen shirts and coarse garments met his view.

They had lain so long undisturbed that they almost came to pieces in the boy's fingers.

He pulled them all out, together with a lot of odds and ends such as made up the outfit of a sailor of over half a century ago.

At the bottom in one corner was a small bundle, the outer covering of which was part of a daily newspaper.

Dick took off the paper and saw that it was the Sydney "Herald" of June 5, 1850.

"Gee! That's a long time ago," he muttered. "Pity the whole paper isn't here. I'd like to read the ancient news it must have contained. I wonder what is wrapped up so carefully," he added, as he unrolled a length of cloth.

It proved to be a tin box, marked with the name of a snuff manufacturer of Glasgow, Scotland.

It was very light, so Dick judged it couldn't contain much.

He opened it and found a piece of folded parchment.

Underneath this was a folded piece of paper, evidently a letter, but the writing had faded away so much that though Dick carried it into the open air he could not decipher it.

Opening the parchment with great curiosity, expecting that it contained some communication of importance, he was surprised and disappointed to find that it was nothing but a blank sheet.

There wasn't a particle of writing on it.

Dick examined it carefully, but could see no reason why it had been so carefully kept in the tin box.

"The letter might explain the mystery if the ink hadn't faded away. As it is, I don't see that this find is going to do me any good. However, I'll keep it as a kind of relic of this island, which I can exhibit to my friends when I get back to 'Frisco."

He returned the two papers to the box, wrapped the box up again in the cloth and started back for the inlet.

Tying the bundle on top of his head with a bit of vine, he waded into the channel and swam across in a few minutes.

"Where did you go?" asked Ben Brace, as Dick came out of the water and began to dress.

"To the hut."

"You must like skeletons."

"I didn't go there on account of the skeleton, but to look the place over."

"What did you find that we didn't see there yesterday?"

"I found the key to the chest."

"What did the chest contain?" asked Bruce curiously.

"Mostly clothes, so old that they are falling to pieces. There was also a lot of junk such as some sailors carry about with them. Lastly, I found this," and Dick showed him the bundle.

"What's in that? Somethin' valuable?"

"The dead man must have considered it valuable, for he had it wrapped up carefully enough; but as far as I can make out it doesn't amount to a hill of beans."

"Let's see."

Dick handed it to him.

He unwrapped the box, which he opened and took out the parchment and the letter.

"Is that all that was in it?"

"That's all."

Brace looked at the letter.

"I can't make out a word of it. Might have been a letter from his sweetheart or his wife. Some chaps think a whole lot of such things. What are you goin' to do with your find?"

"Keep it as a kind of curiosity."

"It's a blamed poor one, I think," replied Brace, returning the box and cloth to him. "Breakfast is ready and it's nearly eight o'clock. Go in and rouse Joe up. He's slept long enough."

Dick awoke Deering, and they came outside together.

"I ought to have a dip before I eat," he said.

"We'll wait for you if you don't take over five minutes," said the sailor.

Joe got out of his clothes and plunged in.

"Time is up," shouted Brace after the lapse of seven minutes.

Joe came out, dressed himself and sat down with his companions.

During the meal Dick told Joe about his visit to the hut on the other side of the channel, and showed him what he had brought away.

Joe examined the contents of the box with great interest.

"The letter must have been written a long time ago, or with a mighty poor quality of ink, for it is faded almost

entirely away," he said. "As for this piece of parchment, it does not seem ever to have been written on."

He replaced the parchment in the box and was about to refold the letter when Ben asked him if he wanted another cup of coffee.

"Sure thing," he replied, laying the letter down on the sand in the full glare of the sun, and holding his cup over to be refilled.

After drinking the coffee he picked up the letter again.

"Great saucpans!" he ejaculated, staring at the paper in great astonishment.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick and the sailor in unison.

"Matter! Look at the letter now, both of you."

They looked and Dick gave a gasp.

The heretofore illegible and faded writing had suddenly blossomed into plain jet-black characters, every word as distinct as though just placed there with a pen.

## CHAPTER V.

### A MAGICAL LETTER.

"What kind of witchcraft is this?" said Dick, gazing, with a feeling of awe, at the writing.

"You've got me," replied Joe.

"What did you do with it?"

"Nothing. Just laid it on the sand alongside of me. When I picked it up to put it back in the box this is the way it looked."

"Well, if that doesn't beat anything I ever saw in my life," said Dick. "What has caused this remarkable change in it, I'd like to know? It's just like a bit of hocus-pocus. Now you don't see it and now you do."

"Maybe exposure to the air has put new life into the writing," suggested Joe. "It has probably been hidden away in that chest anywhere from five to twenty years. Writing, they say, always fades in time, after it has lost a part of its chemical composition."

"So I've heard, but I never heard that exposure to the air would make good the chemical loss. All writing doesn't fade in twenty years or so, for I've seen letters that had been written all of thirty years, and they were almost as plain as the day they were penned."

"Well, let's hear what is in the letter," said Joe.

Dick, who had turned the paper, writing down, on his knee while talking, picked it up with the intention of reading it aloud.

But as he gazed on the paper he gave another gasp of astonishment.

"What are you gaping at?" asked Joe. "Why don't you begin?"

"I can't," answered the bewildered Dick.

"Why can't you? Isn't it written in English?"

"I can't read it because it looks now as it did at first."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Joe, somewhat astonished.

"Look yourself and you will see what I mean."

Joe looked and uttered a low whistle.

The paper presented the same appearance as it did when he first looked at it.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!"

"What in thunder is the matter with you two chaps?" asked the sailor, who could not understand their actions.

"The matter is this letter has faded away again. See!" Ben saw and was as much astonished as the boys.

"That paper is a hoodoo, I guess," he said; "better throw it away. The dead man doesn't want us to read it."

"What has the dead man got to do with it?" asked Dick.

"A whole lot for all we know," replied Brace solemnly, for like many sailors his head was full of superstitious notions.

Dick and Joe, however, were not thus influenced.

They had no particular belief in the supernatural.

After their first surprise wore off they ascribed the magical appearance and disappearance of the writing to natural agencies.

Joe maintained that it was exposure to the air that had temporarily brought the writing out, and that it had now faded for good.

Dick wasn't sure whether Joe's explanation was right or not, but he was willing to accept it for want of a better one.

He refolded the letter, replaced it in the box, and put the box in his pocket.

"Too bad we didn't read it right away and then we'd have known what it said," he remarked regretfully.

"Who'd have thought it would fade away again so quickly?" replied Joe.

"None of us thought so, that's why we got left."

"Hello! What's that?" interrupted Brace, looking out at the water between the island and the reef.

The boys looked and saw a small rowboat floating along.

"It's a boat," said Joe.

"With nobody aboard," said Dick.

"Floated in here from the sea outside the reef."

"I'm going to swim out and get her," said the sailor.

"No, you won't, not yet," put in Joe.

"Why not?"

"Because it isn't right to go into the water so soon after eating."

"Pooh!" returned the sailor.

"It's coming in toward the channel, anyway," said Joe. "Maybe it will float ashore here. If it doesn't it will beach itself at some point on the lagoon."

They watched the boat as it came slowly but steadily on.

It entered the channel and then swung over toward their side of the lagoon.

They followed it along the beach.

Finally it got so close that the sailor waded in and pulled it ashore.

Then they all looked into it.

A magazine rifle was lying across the seats with a cartridge belt thrown across the butt.

A shallow box lay forward with two fish lines, fully equipped, in it.

There was a breaker of fresh water and a basketful of stale sandwiches and other eatables, as well as two pocket flasks of whisky.

A pair of oars ran lengthwise of the seats, and completed the catalogue of the boat's freight.

"It's fitted out for a fishing expedition of two appar-

ently," said Joe. "It has journeyed some distance all by itself."

"Maybe it has floated away from a vessel that's hove to on the other side of the island," said Dick, as the thought struck him.

"We'll find that out mighty quick, mates," said Brace. "Follow me."

Led by the sailor the party started off with rapid strides along the beach for the other side of the island.

Whatever hopes they had entertained of a possible rescue from the island were dissipated when they had tramped almost all around the atoll, and they saw not the slightest sign of a vessel anywhere, even as far off as the horizon.

"We've had our trouble for nothin'," grumbled Brace, who was sorely disappointed because they were as far off as ever from a rescue.

"Better luck next time," replied Joe philosophically.

"That rifle and cartridge belt are a lucky acquisition," said Brace. "We can defy the snake now, and give him a bellyful of lead if he comes around after us."

"We've got a boat, at any rate, and could go off to meet any vessel that may come within reasonable distance of this island," said Joe. "That's a big advantage, too."

The party retraced their steps to the cave, in front of which Ben moored the boat.

"I propose that we start out after dinner and investigate the interior of the island," said Dick. "The rifle will be a good protection for us against that boa constrictor, and we might possibly get a chance to kill it. Are you a good shot, Ben?"

"Pretty fair. I have hit many a bull's-eye at thirty yards," replied Brace.

"That was a stationary mark. Have you had any practice at moving objects?"

"I have shot birds and such like on the wing with a fowling-piece."

"Well, what do you say, Joe—shall we do as I proposed?"

"I'm with you," replied Deering. "Anything for a change."

"We may find some other kinds of tropical fruit besides cocoanuts—bananas possibly, and maybe bread-fruit. The latter is fine when baked right. Our cook on the Polly could serve them up in dandy shape."

"You make my mouth water," said Joe. "I've never tasted any bread-fruit."

"I guess I'll take the boat and go out fishin'," said the sailor. "Nothin' like havin' a change in our bill of fare. Want to come along?"

"Sure," replied Joe; "but only two of us can fish at a time."

"You chaps can take turns, can't you?"

"I guess I wont go," said Dick. "You can carry me across the channel and I'll take another look in' at the hut and see if I missed anything in that chest. It's a good chest, anyway. I'm going to carry it away when a vessel comes to our relief. I've taken quite a fancy to it."

"You're welcome to it," grinned Joe. "I wouldn't have the old thing for a gift. I never cared for anything old-fashioned. I like my things to be up to date."

Dick said he'd take the rifle as a protection against the snake in case it turned up near the hut.

"If you fellows should hear a shot you'll know I've sighted him," he said.

After Ben had provided a can of shell-fish for bait, the three got into the boat, and after Dick was landed on the opposite beach of the channel the other two rowed off to the line of reefs to fish.

Dick went to the hut.

He pulled the chest out of the hut and down on the shore.

There he amused himself examining all the odds and ends it contained.

The clothes he had left at the hut, for they were of no use at all.

He decided to keep a few of the things as mementoes of his visit to the island, then he locked the chest, and attaching the key to a piece of cord placed it around his neck.

Joe and Ben were still fishing some distance away, so Dick threw himself on the sand and waited for them to return.

After a while his thoughts recurred to the letter in the tin box in his pocket, and he thought he would take another look at it.

Getting it out he tried in vain to make out a single word, and at last gave it up as a hopeless job.

Laying the letter on top of the chest, with the writing in the sun, he examined the piece of parchment all over.

He had never handled parchment before, and it interested him.

It was deeply creased in the two folds, but otherwise it seemed as good as the day it was made, which was undoubtedly a good many years since.

He spread it out on the warm lid of the trunk and tried to smooth out the creases.

He was not very successful at this.

While he was thus engaged he casually glanced at the letter.

Wonder of wonders! The faded writing once more stood out bold and clear in every detail.

Truly it seemed to be an enchanted letter, and Dick gazed at it in spellbound amazement.

## CHAPTER VI.

### PIRATE GOLD.

"Gee! This is the most remarkable thing I ever saw. At one moment when you look at the blamed letter the writing is so faded you can't read it to save you; when you look at it again it is as bright as though it were just written. I'd give something to know the cause of this mysterious appearance and disappearance. Well, let's see what it says before it gives me the slip again."

It was not an educated hand, but the characters were plain and bold, and Dick had no difficulty in reading it.

What he read caused him to sit up and take notice, as the saying is.

This is what the letter contained:

"Dear Bill—Im feelin purty good for a chap as has a half ounce ball in his vitals that the doctor says is sure to fetch him inside of 48 hours. I aint got no time to tell you how me and the ball come together. Its a long story

and time is short. You've been a good pal and I'm sorry you ain't here to see the last of me. Howsumever it can't be helped. Now listen Bill I'm goin to make you a rich man. I expected that you and me would both be rich men but as I'm all in you will have my share too. I'm sendin you a parchment with full directions how to find the island where the pirates gold is, and the place where its hid after you git there. You won't see no writin on the parchment cause its written in invisible ink. To find the writin hold the smooth side of the parchment before a fire or set it out in the sun, then it will come out and you can read it same as print. I've writ this letter so it will fade out after ten days, but you'll git it afore that. If you want to read it any time after that hold it before a fire or out in the sun. I would like to say a lot more but I guess it ain't necessary. Go to the island, which is a atoll in lat and long given in parchment, git the money and enjoy it. I wish you luck and long life. Goodbye. JIM."

As the astonished Dick read the writing it gradually faded under his eyes, so that by the time he reached the signature he could hardly make it out.

However, that didn't matter, for he had discovered the secret of its appearance and disappearance, and he knew when he wanted to read it again all he had to do was to lay it in the sunshine and it would come out as bright as ever.

"So that parchment contains directions for finding a pirate's gold, and it's written in invisible ink, so all I have to do is to let the sun shine on its smooth side in order to bring the writing out. It shows how to find the island where the gold is, and then gives directions how to find the treasure itself. At the end of the letter Jim, the writer, says it's an atoll, so I guess this is the island. That skeleton in the hut must be all that's left of Bill, who doubtless came here to get the gold, and did not live to discover it. Probably he was taken sick and died before he could do anything. Now the treasure will come to me if I'm lucky enough to read the directions right, and everything turns out all right. Gee! Talk about luck! If I find that treasure I'll be swimming in it. Joe and Ben ought to have a share in it, for we're companions in misfortune, and they seem to be first-class chaps. I think one-half for me as discoverer of the secret, and the other half divided between them for helping me get it, is a fair deal. At any rate, I'll let them decide. If they say it ought to be a third all around I'll let it go at that. But I'm counting my chickens before they're hatched. Everything depends on the parchment. I must put the smooth side in the sun and bring out the writing. If for some reason or another the writing fails to come out that will be the end of the pirate's gold at the very start."

Dick, in no little excitement, reached for the parchment, to see which was the smooth and which the rough side of it.

The moment his fingers touched it he saw that the heretofore blank surface was covered with writing and figures.

It had been lying in the sun all the time Dick was reading and musing over the letter, and the material was quite hot.

Apparently the smooth side had been turned to the sun-shine.

Without loss of time the young castaway began eagerly to master the words and characters he saw before him.

The writing was different from that of the letter, and clearly it was not Jim who had written, or rather printed, it.

It was the hand of an uneducated man, and was scrawled so badly that at first Dick could not make head or tail of it.

Gradually he began to get the hang of it, and after going over it half a dozen times things looked clearer.

Still, for all that he could not translate its real meaning.

It would be useless for us to transcribe the contents of the parchment, for the reader wouldn't understand it any better than Dick did.

Jim had evidently been able to get at its sense, and no doubt Bill had been equally fortunate, but so far as the young castaway was concerned it might just as well have been a Chinese puzzle.

After figuring over it in vain for twenty minutes the fading of the characters, as the paper grew cold, settled the matter for the time being, and Dick folded it up, returned it with the letter to the tin box and put the box in his pocket.

"The three of us will have to study this thing out somehow. If we fail we'll have to try some other means of finding the pirate's gold. It's likely that we'll have lots of time in which to do it, for I'm afraid this island is out of the general track of vessels, and that it is likely to be some weeks before we are so fortunate as to be rescued. The knowledge that there is a pirate's treasure on this island will afford us all the excitement hunting for it that we need to keep time from hanging heavily on our hands."

At that moment Dick heard a hail.

Looking toward the water he saw the rowboat, propelled by Brace, rapidly approaching the beach.

Joe held up two strings of good-sized fish to show him how lucky they had been at the sport.

Dick got up and walked over to the water's edge.

"I see you've been taking things easy, Dick," said Deering, as the boat's bow swung around close to the beach. "We piped you off every once in awhile and you seemed to be doing nothing more strenuous than sunning yourself. Want to put the chest aboard? I'll give you a lift."

Joe sprang ashore and helped Dick place the chest athwart the boat.

Then they both jumped in and Ben resumed his rowing, heading straight for the entrance to the channel.

"I see you've caught quite a mess of fish," said Dick, "and they're fine ones, too."

"There's lots of them over along the reef. We could have had twice as many as you see. In fact, we threw overboard all but the best ones," replied Joe.

"I'll have to go with you next time and take a hand."

"You could have gone with us this time if you hadn't been so bent on going to the hut again. You and the skeleton ought to be on pretty good terms by this time," chuckled Joe.

"Bet your life we are. He has made me his heir," answered Dick.

"His heir! What do you mean?"

"He's left me a dandy legacy, if I can only get hold of it."

"How could a skeleton leave you a legacy?"

"There's more ways than one of doing it. I'll have to explain or you'd never understand. You know that letter I found with the piece of parchment in the chest?"

"Of course."

"I've read it."

"The dickens you have!" ejaculated Joe in surprise. "How did you manage to do it?"

"By accident. I found out the secret that causes it to appear and disappear."

"The deuce you did. What is the secret?"

"It's written in sympathetic ink, and strong heat will make the writing legible for a short time."

"How did you get on to it?"

"By accident, I tell you. I laid the letter down in the sun on top of the chest. When I picked it up the writing was just as clear as it was when it appeared to us this morning in the same shape. The writer stated in it that it was written with invisible ink, and that of course explained the whole mystery."

"What was in the letter? Anything of importance?"

"I should say so."

"Let's hear."

"It was written by a man named Jim, who was dying from a bullet wound, to his friend Bill, and Bill is without doubt the skeleton in the hut, otherwise the letter wouldn't be in his chest."

"That's right," nodded Joe.

"Well, Jim sent the piece of parchment enclosed in the letter so that Bill might become a wealthy man."

"How would the parchment make him wealthy?"

"Because it contained directions for finding a pirate's treasure."

"It did?" said Joe in a tone of astonishment.

"It did, or rather it does."

"How do you know? Does the letter say so?"

"The letter does."

"But there's nothing written on the parchment. If there was we'd have seen it."

"There is writing on the parchment, and the reason we didn't see it was because it's written in invisible ink."

"Did you bring the writing on that out, too, with the heat of the sun?"

"I did."

"Let's see it."

"It has faded away again, but after dinner we'll heat both the letter and the parchment and then you can read both of them."

"Did you find out where this pirate's treasure is?"

"Not near enough to walk up and put my hand on it."

"But you found out pretty near where it is, eh?"

"Yes. I think it's near enough for the three of us to find it if we hunt persistently for it."

"You don't mean to say that treasure is on this island, do you?"

"That's just where it is."

At that moment the boat arrived opposite the cave, and Ben, who had not been paying particular attention to the conversation between the boys, jumped out and made the painter fast to a stick in the sand.

## CHAPTER VII.

### NIGHT VISITORS TO THE ISLAND.

"The treasure is on this island?" said Joe, making no effort to leave the boat, so interested was he in the revelation Dick had just made to him.

"It's on this island," replied Dick, nodding his head.

"What's the matter with you chaps?" exclaimed Brace impatiently. "Why don't you get ashore? Want to stay there all day?"

Dick jumped on the beach and Joe followed him.

"Give me a lift with the chest," said Dick.

Joe laid hold of the box, and between them they carried it into the cave, depositing it near the entrance.

"Don't the parchment show the exact spot where it is hidden?" said Joe, sitting on the chest.

"I guess it does."

"If it does, and you've read the writing, why don't you know just where to look for it?"

"Because the writing and figures are not very intelligible to me."

"What's the matter with them?"

"No use of me trying to explain, for I couldn't. You will understand when you see the puzzle yourself. You might be able to do better with it than I can, or Ben may beat us both at it. If the three of us are stumped by it, and we can't translate the meaning at all, we must simply make a very close search of the island, and try to find the treasure that way. If the pirate's gold isn't moonshine, it is somewhere on this island, and it's up to us to hunt for it."

"Well, you can bet your life I'm on the job," replied Joe eagerly.

"Say, you chaps are takin' things easy," said Brace, coming from the boat with the two strings of fish. "Come, get busy and make a fire while I clean enough of these for a square meal."

Dismissing the subject of the pirate's gold until later, the two boys got a hustle on and soon had a fire going on the beach.

As soon as they sat down to their meal Dick told Ben about his discovery in connection with the letter and the parchment, and how from the indications they contained he believed there was a hidden treasure on the island.

The sailor was tremendously interested in the idea of a pirate's gold being hidden on the island.

He had heard lots of stories about buried treasure-troves on different South Sea islands—the spoil of the old Pacific buccaneers, who once upon a time made it their business to plunder the vessels that sailed those waters.

It was said that a large part of the pirates' plunder remained where they had hidden it, and so the sailor began to scent gold in the air, and gold had a big attraction for him, as it has for most people.

"Let's see those documents again," he said.

"Wait till we get through dinner and then the three of us will try and study the matter out. Three heads are better than one, but I warn you in advance that it is no easy job we'll have on our hands," said Dick.

"Easy or hard, if there's money in it, I'm in for it. How are we going to divide up in case we find it? Maybe

"you'll claim the bulk of it 'cause you own the documents?" said the sailor rather aggressively.

"No, I don't mean to do that, though I think my share ought to be the larger. However, I'm not going to scrap over the division. If you and Joe say that it ought to be thirds all around, I'll let it go at that," replied Dick.

"I'll allow you're entitled to half. Joe and me'll divide the other half between us. How is that, Joe?"

"Suits me all right. Dick ought to have the most because if it hadn't been for him we wouldn't have known anything about the matter," replied Joe.

"That's settled then," said Brace. "Dick is to have half of whatever treasure we may find, and you and me divide the rest even up."

Dinner concluded, Dick produced the box and brought forth the letter and bit of parchment.

The latter was blank and the former nearly so.

Both were spread out in the sunshine, and the three watched the effect of the heat upon them.

The letter began to show reviving signs first, but characters soon began to shape themselves on the parchment.

As soon as the writing on the letter became distinct, Dick picked it up and passed it over to Joe.

"Read it aloud, so that Ben will understand what it says," he said.

Joe did so, and both of them agreed that there was surely a treasure on that island.

By that time the parchment was covered with words and figures again, and Dick invited Joe and the sailor to study its import out between them.

While they were trying to do this he put some water to boil so as to facilitate the washing of the dishes.

Then he joined them and asked how they were getting on.

"We're not getting on at all," replied Joe. "We can't make head or tail of anything except the directions for finding this island, which seem pretty clear. That's something we don't need to know, as we're already here."

"That 'F' may mean fathoms or feet," said Ben. "Supposin' a sailor wrote it I should say it meant fathoms, but still it doesn't follow. A fathom is six feet, and '12 F from three palms standin' in a row facing E. S. E.' would mean 72 feet. The three palms in question stand 'N. N.  $\frac{1}{2}$  E. from'—what? The word is lost in the fold. Several characters are blotted out by the creases, and as all are important to a proper understandin' of the whole, the outlook looks rather shaky."

They spent two hours studying the parchment, reheating it at frequent intervals, and the result of their combined industry was far from encouraging.

However, they were of the unanimous opinion that the pirate's gold was hidden somewhere in the northern ring of the atoll.

They therefore decided to make a close hunt in that direction for the signs not very clearly indicated by the parchment in its present condition.

"We'll start in to-morrow morning early," said Dick, "and see how we come out. I guess we'll have all the time we want on our hands to make a thorough search, for it doesn't look as if we are going to get away from this island very soon."

They talked of nothing else but the treasure during the

rest of the afternoon, and after supper Dick and Ben turned in early, leaving Joe to stand the first watch.

At four in the morning Ben, who had relieved Joe at midnight, called Dick to take his place, and the young castaway went down to the water's edge to bathe his face and freshen himself up.

The cave was so stuffy that he decided to stand watch outside.

Armed with the magazine rifle, he took up his post just outside the ring of the firelight, and kept his eyes not only on the cave, but on the shrubbery for some yards on either side of the entrance.

An hour passed and then he suddenly heard a sound out on the water.

"What the dickens is that?" he asked himself.

He listened intently.

The noise was like the beating of water with oars or paddles.

It came nearer every moment, and the surprised boy kept his eyes on the point whence the sounds came.

At length he made out a moving object in the gloom.

"It's a boat," he muttered. "Has some vessel come to a stop off the island, and seeing our fire perhaps sent a boat ashore to investigate?"

The object, in which were a number of dim shadows, rapidly came in through the channel and approached the shore near the fire.

As soon as it touched the beach all but one of the shadows sprang out on the sand and dashed up to the fire.

Dick saw that the intruders were South Sea savages, almost naked and very dark-skinned.

Their skin shone in the glare of the flames as though it was polished with oil.

Their dark hair was gathered in a top-knot secured by a couple of long bleached fish bones.

Each wore around his neck a necklace of small sharks' teeth, as white as polished ivory.

In their hands they carried short spears, and their actions were decidedly aggressive.

"Gracious!" breathed Dick. "Those chaps don't look very friendly. I'm afraid there is going to be trouble, and quite a bunch of it."

The savages remained but a moment around the fire.

One of them, who seemed to be the leader, uttered some guttural expressions and pointed at the entrance to the cave.

The whole bunch immediately glided over toward it.

Dick had no doubt that they intended to go into the cave, so he thought it was time to butt in.

Taking aim at the legs of the foremost one, he was about to pull the trigger, when something glided over the face of the entrance, seized the leader of the blacks and lifted him off his feet.

He uttered a scream of terror, while his companions paused in their advance and huddled together in a bunch.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TREASURE-HUNTING.

For a moment Dick was as much astonished as were the savages.

Then the truth dawned on him, and the firelight flashed

on a long, sinuous body which had wrapped two folds of itself around the naked unfortunate.

It was the boa constrictor that had been lying in wait for a victim just above the opening of the cave.

The cries of the savage leader and the terrified ejaculations of the rest of the bunch awoke both Joe and Ben, and they came rushing to the entrance to see what was up.

They were amazed and disconcerted to see the half-dozen naked natives gesticulating wildly with their arms and spears.

The cries of the fellow above their heads called their attention to the head of the snake and the legs of the savage imprisoned by the reptile's folds.

Joe, on the spur of the moment, pulled out his revolver and fired at the boa.

The bullet chipped a piece of flesh out of the snake's neck, and caused it to draw itself out of sight.

The contraction of its body crushed the savage into a kind of pulp, and his cries instantly ceased.

With one accord the natives, disregarding the two boys, flung their spears at the retreating reptile, but it was doubtful if they did any execution.

Two of the spears struck the coral formation and dropped at Ben's feet.

He picked them up and held on to them, for neither he nor Joe liked the looks of their unexpected visitors.

They wondered where Dick was all this time.

The young castaway thought it prudent to keep in the background.

He held his rifle ready for business when Joe and Ben first appeared at the entrance to the cave, thinking the savages intended to attack them, but seeing them throw their spears at the snake instead of at his companions, he felt that having disarmed themselves they were no longer formidable, and so he watched to see what they would do next.

When the boa and its dead victim disappeared into the thick vegetation the bunch of natives gathered together and held an excited conference in their own guttural lingo.

At the conclusion of the talk they made a break for their boat, got into it and rowed away into the darkness.

Dick then advanced.

"Hello! Where have you been?" asked Joe. "Hiding from that crowd?"

"I thought it advisable not to let them see me," replied Dick.

"You saw them when they landed, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you suppose were their intentions?"

"I judge that the fire attracted them. When they got out of the boat they made a rush for the cave, and I was about to fire on the leader when the snake saved me the trouble. He snatched the chap as quick as a wink, and that brought the rest to a stop. The outcry they made brought you and Ben to the door. You know what followed."

"That boa did us a good turn, after all. Now that it has provided itself with a square meal it probably won't bother us for some little time. When a big snake has eaten heartily he lies torpid for a time while digesting his meal. This boa will no doubt be in that condition in an hour or so from now. It will be a couple of weeks or more

before he becomes dangerous again. That will give us a chance to find and kill him."

"We must try and do it, then," replied Dick. "We are not safe while the reptile is alive upon this island. The next meal it makes may be off one of us, while we're in search of the pirate's gold."

"Then I think we ought to devote our first efforts to finding and getting rid of the snake," said Joe.

Ben, however, thought they ought to search for the treasure first.

The lure of the gold was strong upon him, and his chief thought was to secure his share of the pirate's hidden plunder.

"We'll continue the argument in the morning," said Dick. "You fellows turn in again and finish your sleep."

An hour later daylight came, and Dick put a pot of water on to boil.

During breakfast the question as to whether they should hunt for the treasure or the snake that morning was argued.

"We'll have plenty of time to look for the boa," said Ben, who was bent on looking for the treasure and nothing else. "I'm more interested in the gold."

The boys saw that the sailor wouldn't be satisfied unless they fell in with him, so it was agreed to hunt for the treasure.

They went over to the northern circle of the island and began their investigations.

Their first object was to locate three palm trees in a row facing east-southeast.

They found any number of palms, but no combination of three answering the description.

They searched all morning and well into the afternoon in vain, and then returned to the cave tired and hungry.

Ben was in bad humor over the result, and had little to say.

They had the balance of the fish left over from the day before, which they had kept fresh in a pool of cold water, and some canned meats and vegetables.

Their dessert consisted of cocoanut pulp, and their drink cocoanut milk.

After the meal they rowed around to the north again and resumed their hunt.

They had no better luck, though they stuck at it till nearly sunset.

"I guess that letter and parchment are frauds," growled Ben in a tone of disgust, as they returned to their boat.

"I don't agree with you," replied Dick.

"Well, we've hunted the whole of the north side over and there isn't a sign of those three trees, or anythin' else mentioned in the document," grumbled Brace.

"Those particular trees may have been blown down since the man who wrote the directions was on the island. How long do you think the trees ought to stand under the most favorable circumstances?"

"How should I know how long they ought to stand?"

"Well, there you are. It must be a very long time ago, maybe a hundred years, since the chap wrote the directions on the parchment."

"What makes you think it's so long as that? I don't believe it's fifty years."

"Because he used a piece of parchment instead of paper."

"Couldn't he have got a piece of parchment fifty years ago, or even less?"

"I suppose he could, but as good paper was to be got reasonably fifty years ago, I think he would have been more likely to have used it than parchment."

"I know a good reason why he would have preferred parchment to any kind of paper," said Ben.

"What is the reason?"

"The fact that parchment is more durable than the best paper. That chap wanted that information to keep—that's why he put it on parchment," replied Ben with an air of triumph.

"There's something in that," admitted Dick. "But I don't believe he intended to hand that information down to others. He made it simply for his own use, to fasten the knowledge on paper so that in case any of the facts slipped from his mind he could refresh his memory by consulting the document. His poor writing, or rather printing, of the words showed that he was not an educated man. Apparently not being used to the pen he contracted his words, and as the memorandum was meant only for his own eye, as I figure it, he would always understand what the contractions meant. Those contractions are what baffle us largely now."

"If we could find the three trees in a row facing east-sou'east, we might get around those contractions somehow," persisted Ben.

"It's my opinion those three trees have gone the way of the writer, and that we'll never find them."

"Then how in thunder are we goin' to find the treasure?"

"I don't know that we'll ever find it; but there is no use getting discouraged at the start. If there is a treasure on the island, as I earnestly believe, it is doubtless worth a whole lot of hunting for. If you're sick of the job, Joe and I will continue it on our own hook."

By that time the boat was in the channel and close to the cave, so further conversation on the subject came to a close.

They landed, and Ben began to make a fire, while the boys entered the cave.

Then it was they made a startling discovery.

Their store of provisions had been looted while they were away hunting for the pirate's gold.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE UNKNOWN MARAUDER.

"Great Scott! Somebody has been here!" ejaculated Joe with a look of dismay.

"That seems evident. I thought we were the only ones on the island," replied Dick.

"Those savages must have come back and helped themselves to what they saw," said Joe.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you are right. They may have landed somewhere along the island during the night after leaving here and then they probably watched us go away, and when the coast was clear they investigated the cave. Let's see how much they have stolen."

The boys examined their stores and found that about as much as one man could carry had been appropriated by the thieves.

The loss was more aggravating than serious.

If the savages were the guilty parties the boys wondered why they hadn't carried off everything in sight, for the opportunity to do so had been theirs.

"We ought to be thankful they took away so little," said Dick. "After this one of us will have to remain here on guard until we are certain the natives have left the island."

Ben was as mad as a hornet when he heard about the theft.

Tired and hungry as he was, if it hadn't been almost dark he would have proposed hunting up the savages and teaching them a lesson.

It was Ben's first watch that night, and when he went on duty the others went to their bunks.

Nothing happened to disturb them that night, and during breakfast the plans for the day were discussed.

"Let's hunt up those thieves and chase them off the island," suggested Ben.

"Where do you suppose they came from?" asked Dick. "There isn't another island in sight of this from any point of the compass."

"There is probably a large one where those chaps belong just out of sight."

"Seems to me those natives were taking great chances to come such a long distance in a small canoe."

"That isn't anythin' for these islanders. I've known of them to go a hundred miles or more in their canoes."

"How do they manage to find their way without a compass?"

"By instinct, I guess. They can do a lot of things that a civilized white man can't do."

"Those fellows had a warlike look night before last. Only for the snake I'm afraid we'd have been in a peck of trouble."

It was decided to look up the intruders, and the party started by land for the south side of the island, where the savages were supposed to be.

They made a pretty close search of the southern and eastern sides of the atoll, but found not the slightest signs of the natives.

"They must be pretty slick at the game of hide-and-seek, or we should have discovered some trace of their camping ground," said Dick.

"I guess they've left the island," said Joe. "As it wasn't possible for them to carry much off in their canoe that will account for them taking so little."

Giving up the search for the savages, they returned to the northern end of the island and continued their hunt for the pirate's gold.

After continuing their investigations well into the afternoon without result, they went back to the cave as hungry as hunters.

Then it was that Joe discovered that a fresh levy had been put upon their store of provisions.

Just as before the amount missing was about what an ordinary man could have carried off.

"Say, this beats the deck," he said, coming out of the cave, where he had gone to fetch some stuff for supper.

"What's the trouble now?" asked Dick.

"Our grub has been pinched again."

"It has?" replied Dick in surprise.

"It has for a fact."

"How much has been taken this time?"

"About the same amount as before."

"It can't be the savages who are the thieves, for they appear to have left the island. There is somebody else around."

"Looks like it."

"We'll have to set a watch and try and discover who the marauder is."

"I'd like to catch the chap, whoever he is. I'd wring his neck," said Ben angrily. "Joe and me didn't take the trouble to bring the stuff ashore from the wreck of the brig for the benefit of any rascal who thinks he has the right to help himself to it without asking our permission."

"That's right," nodded Joe. "We wouldn't refuse sharing our provisions with any one who needed something to eat, but we won't stand to have it stolen."

Ben said he'd remain at the cave that afternoon and watch while the boys continued their search for the treasure.

After dinner Dick and Joe started off, the former carrying the rifle.

"I move we spend the rest of the afternoon looking for the snake," suggested Dick. "Ben doesn't like the job, and something ought to be done to put that boa out of business before it gets lively again."

"I'm willing, but the question is where shall we look for it?" said Joe.

"I imagine it's lying around somewhere at the back of the cave. If it was as hungry as we have supposed it wouldn't go far before bolting the body of the savage. Then it wouldn't go any further."

Accordingly the boys made a close search of the shrubbery all around the rear of the cave for some distance, but they failed to discover the least trace of the reptile.

They continued to look for the snake till the sun went down, and then they returned to the cave.

Ben announced that no one had been about.

"I rowed across the channel and hid in the bushes on the other side, where I had a good view of the entrance to the cave, but the intruder failed to make his appearance," he said. "I dare say he'll be around to-morrow, so we'll have to keep up the watch till we catch him."

After breakfast Dick and Joe cast lots to see which of them would stand watch over their property, and the latter lost, so Dick and Ben went off together.

They continued the hunt for the treasure along the eastern section of the island, but without success.

When they got back for dinner Joe reported that the marauder had not appeared.

"It would seem as if the fellow suspected we were laying for him," he said.

"Probably he's got enough supplies to last him a few days. When they are gone he'll be around again, and then we'll nab him," said Ben.

After dinner the sailor volunteered to watch again, and the boys were willing he should do so.

They went off together and devoted their time to looking for the snake.

"I wonder where the reptile has hidden itself?" said Joe, after they had put in three hours of unavailing endeavor.

"Give it up. I'll bet it was foxy enough to retire to some hole, where it lies all curled up in blissful repose," replied Dick. "The instinct even of snakes is something marvelous. You can't beat 'em. That boa is going to give us a lot of trouble before it sees its finish."

"Blame the thing!" grumbled Joe. "I wish to gracious we never took it aboard the brig at Batavia. Those Java snakes are said to be the worst in the business."

"What's been done can't be undone, old man," replied Dick philosophically. "I don't like the idea of treasure-hunting when one may be snatched bald-headed any moment by that huge reptile. I haven't got over the sight of that poor old savage helpless in its grasp the other night. It might just as well have been myself as the native. There is no doubt in my mind that the boa was laying for one of us to come out of the cave. I don't know how I escaped when I walked out to stand my watch. Just my good luck, I suppose."

Ben again reported that the person who had twice made free with their supplies had not put in his appearance during the afternoon, though to all appearances the coast was clear for him.

"I suppose you lads haven't made any progress this afternoon?" he said.

"No. We didn't find even one of the marks mentioned in the parchment," replied Joe, who didn't care to tell the sailor that he and Dick had spent their time looking for the snake.

Next morning Dick agreed to remain behind and watch the cave, and the others went off into the shrubbery, intending to continue their hunt for the treasure on the east ring of the atoll.

Dick rowed across the channel, tied the boat to a stake in the shore, and then hid behind a bunch of palm trees.

Two hours passed away and nothing happened.

"I guess the marauder has us under watch," thought the young castaway. "When he notices that only two of us go off together he suspects that the third is staying behind to watch. He is no doubt a foxy rascal. I don't believe it's one of those natives that we saw the other night, unless they left one of their number behind; and yet it doesn't seem reasonable that any white person other than ourselves is on the island. If such was the case, he wouldn't stay in the background, but would join us for company's sake."

At that moment Dick glanced across at the opposite side of the channel.

He saw the vegetation part not far from the entrance to the cave and an old man, barefooted and bareheaded, dressed in ragged garments, with a long white beard, step cautiously out into the open, look warily around, and then advance slowly toward the cave, which he entered after pausing a while to make sure no one was in there.

"I've spotted the thief at last!" said Dick in some excitement.

## CHAPTER X.

### DICK IS TREATED TO A SURPRISE.

With his revolver ready in case of emergency, Dick ran down to the boat, cast it loose, and rowed as silently as possible across the narrow channel.

Making the painter fast, he decided not to enter the cave, but watch outside and catch the old fellow when he came out.

"He seems to be taking his time," mused the boy, as fully a quarter of an hour elapsed and the marauder was still in the cave. "I guess he's making a critical examination of our supplies this time. He looks like a pretty old fellow. I wonder where he's been keeping himself out of sight? I should think that Joe and Ben would have seen him during the time they've been here. This island isn't so large that its inhabitants should find any difficulty in finding one another at any time. Maybe he's a recent arrival, though he looks like a man who has been outside of civilization some time. Here he comes now, with his arms full of plunder."

Dick drew his revolver, stepped forward and confronted the marauder.

"So we've caught you, eh?" said Dick. "You're a nice old scarecrow to be doing the sneak act when you might have had anything you wanted for the asking."

The man stopped and stared at him, and Dick had every opportunity to note his appearance at close quarters.

It was impossible to say just how old he really was, but he looked, with his tanned and seamy features, and his tangled long beard, to be all of seventy.

His face had rather a benign expression, though there was a kind of wild look in his eyes.

He seemed more like an old hermit than anything else, and his ragged garments indicated that he had been away from the haunts of mankind a considerable time.

Altogether Dick hardly knew what to make of him.

He did not appear to be at all dangerous, so the boy put up his weapon as he awaited a reply from him.

The old man did not open his mouth, however.

He looked startled and uneasy, and for the moment seemed uncertain what to do.

As Dick took another step forward the spell was broken.

Dropping the load he carried in his arms, he made a dash for the shrubbery.

"Hold on!" cried Dick. "I'm not going to hurt you. I want to speak to you."

The old man paid no attention to him, but continued his headlong course.

"I'm going to find out where he is hiding if I can," muttered the young castaway, starting after him.

Dick was a swift runner, and having the advantage of youth, he rapidly overhauled the fugitive as he fled through the tropical vegetation.

Suddenly the old man darted behind a spur of coral that stuck up a dozen feet into the air, and when Dick flew around it, too, he found himself at fault.

The old fellow had disappeared as though he had vanished into the air.

Thinking he was crouching down in the shrubbery, the boy beat the bushes all around, but without finding any trace of him.

"Where could he have gone?" he breathed. "Had he kept on running I couldn't have missed him. He vanished right at that rock, and there isn't a hole in it that I can see where he could have crawled in."

The old fellow's disappearance was such a puzzle that

Dick resolved to get at the bottom of it if it took the rest of the afternoon.

He looked the rock over on all sides, and then began to tramp around in the tall vegetation at its base.

Suddenly his feet slipped from under him and he slid like a flash into a hole before he could save himself.

He slipped along a smooth, hard pathway for perhaps a dozen feet and then came to a stop.

Picking himself up, he saw a glimmer of light ahead.

"I'm in the hole of the old fox," he muttered. "I guess I'll make him talk to me now, if I have to threaten him with my revolver."

The light came through a large jagged hole in the coral wall, and Dick looked through it.

The sight he saw surprised him as much as his appearance surprised the two inmates of the place.

It was a large roomy cavern, the roof of which was about three feet above the level of the shore of the island.

It was illuminated by the sun's rays that filtered through hundreds of little holes in the shore side, giving the whole of the three-foot line the appearance of slightly perforated ground glass.

The occupants of this cave were the old, ragged, white-bearded man and a fair young girl of about fifteen.

She was lying on a couch of dried vegetation which was covered with a blanket.

She did not look ill, but there was apparently something the matter with her.

Dick bent his head and entered the place, whereat the old man, with a look of deep anxiety, got between him and the girl.

"Don't be afraid, sir, I'm not going to harm any one here," said Dick in a friendly tone.

His words had little effect on the old chap, who stood his ground, though he did not look very aggressive.

"Father," said the girl, "sit down."

Her words had an immediate effect upon him, though the anxious expression clung to his face.

He obeyed her mandate as meekly as a little child, and without a word.

The girl did not appear to be at all alarmed by the presence of Dick.

Indeed, there was nothing in his appearance that could frighten her.

He was a good-looking, open-faced lad, and a cheery light shone from his eyes.

His was a face that would inspire confidence anywhere.

"You are a sailor, I should think," said the girl, regarding him intently. "Is your vessel off this island?"

An eager look came into her eyes as she spoke, as though she saw deliverance close at hand.

"No, miss, I am sorry to say. I am a castaway. I came ashore on a piece of wreck after a storm nearly a week ago. Are you and your father castaways, too?"

"We are," she answered, the light dying out of her face, for she was keenly disappointed. "Our schooner was wrecked here eight months ago, and only my father and myself were saved. Father received a blow on his head while swimming ashore with me, and he's never been himself since. The cook and three men who made up the crew were lost overboard."

"And you have been on this island eight months?"

"We have."

"How can you expect to see and signal a vessel if you live down in this underground place?"

"I do not expect it until I am able to get out in the air, which I hope will be very shortly. Our presence here is due to the fact that about six weeks ago I fell through the hole in the shrubbery that connects with this cave and hurt one of my legs badly. I thought at the time that it was broken. I should have perished here miserably, only my father was with me at the time and saw me fall in. He followed, and finding that I was badly hurt, and that he could not carry me back outside, he made me as comfortable as possible here, and we have lived here together ever since, poor father being my nurse and provider."

"May I ask you your name, miss?"

"Josie Barnes. My father is Captain Richard Barnes. We are Americans. Until my mother's death a year and a half ago I lived in San Francisco."

"San Francisco!" ejaculated Dick. "That's where I hail from."

"Then you are an American, too?" she answered with a smile.

"I am. My name is Dick Danvers. I sailed from 'Frisco on my second voyage before the mast on the bark Polly, about three months ago. The Polly foundered in the storm I mentioned, and every one aboard was lost but myself."

"I am glad to know you, Dick Danvers. I hope we shall be good friends, for we are companions in distress, and we can be company for each other."

"It won't be my fault if we aren't good friends, Miss Barnes. I can sympathize with you for being under the weather, and I will do all I can for you while we are fated to remain on this atoll. I am sure I can say the same for my friends, too."

"Your friends!" she exclaimed. "I don't understand you."

"I have two companions in misfortune. They are Joe Deering, a boy of about my age, and Ben Brace, a sailor, some years older. They were wrecked on this island a month before I came here. I met them a few hours after I was washed ashore."

The girl was astonished at this news.

"Father never told me that there were others on this island besides ourselves. But then he hasn't left me long since I met with my accident. Only about long enough to procure fruit for our subsistence. Four days ago he surprised me by bringing in here an armful of canned meats and vegetables. I asked him where he got them, but he did not seem able to give me any information. On the following day he brought a second supply, including a box of crackers. I judged that he must have found them on some wreck that had gone ashore inside the reefs. Can you explain the matter?"

"I can," replied Dick. "It is part of our supplies that we have in the cave where we have put up. The stuff came from the wreck of the brig that brought Joe and Ben to this island. I saw your father taking them from the cave this morning and I hailed him. He fled from me as though I were an enemy. I followed him, and lost him at the rock above. I figured that he must have disappeared through some opening in the rock, though I could not see

any. While hunting for it I fell into the hole that brought me here. Otherwise I guess you wouldn't have seen me, nor should I have known of your presence on the island until you were able to leave this cave and show yourself."

Dick had a long conversation with the girl, and he promised to bring his companions to see her after dinner.

"We'll bring you and your father some hot coffee, some nice cooked shell-fish and other things when we come. You may depend on it that you shall want for nothing that we can supply you."

"Thank you, Dick Danvers, you are very good," she replied gratefully. "You mustn't mind father's actions. He is not right in his head. I hope that he may get better when he is no longer obliged to remain down here all day, as he insists on doing as long as I am here."

"Well, I must be going now, as I dare say my friends will be back at the cave from their jaunt around the island, and they will miss me. You may depend on seeing the three of us in about a couple of hours from now, and we will bring you and your father the best meal we can get up."

Thus speaking, Dick bade the girl good-by, made his way up the smooth incline to the surface and started for the cave.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DICK TAKES HIS COMPANIONS TO THE UNDERGROUND CAVE.

Ben and Joe were already back, and were about setting off after a mess of shell-fish to vary their dinner bill of fare.

"Hello! Where have you been?" asked Joe when Dick came up. "You're a nice fellow to stand watch. While you were away the marauder has been here and stole some more of our provisions."

"Sure of that, are you?" chuckled Dick.

"Of course I'm sure of it. Ben and I found a lot of stuff in front of the cave that he dropped in his hurry to get away. If you hadn't wandered away you would have caught him."

"Your talk shows how much you don't know about the matter," replied Dick. "I caught the man coming out of the cave with his arms full of canned goods. The stuff you found on the sand is what he intended to take away. When he saw me he dropped the stuff and ran. I chased him and discovered where he hangs out."

"Oh, then, that's why you were away. I take everything back. Now tell us about the marauder. Was he one of the savages?"

"No. He's an old sea captain who was wrecked on this island eight months ago with his daughter. He looks like Rip Van Winkle did at the end of his twenty years' sleep, and is a little off in his upper story."

"What's that? He was wrecked here eight months ago with his daughter?" ejaculated Joe. "Say, what are you giving us? Don't you suppose we'd have seen him if he was on the island when we came?"

"He and his daughter were here just the same, and they are here now. I talked over an hour with her in the cave where she's been laid up six weeks with an injured leg."

"Is that right?" asked Joe, beginning to believe Dick at last.

"Of course it's right."

"Where is this cave? I thought we'd been nearly all over the island several times. I don't see how we could have missed that cave."

"We missed it because it's an underground one, the entrance to which is hid in the shrubbery. I wouldn't have found it only I fell through the hole and landed down in it. I promised the girl—her name is Josie Barnes—that I'd bring you chaps around after dinner and introduce you."

"All right, we'll go with you. Now come and help me get a mess of shell-fish while Ben makes a fire to roast them."

On the way to the place where they gathered the fish Dick told Joe all the facts connected with Josie Barnes and her father.

Joe was eager to see the girl, whom Dick said was very bright and pretty.

"We'll make quite a party all together," he said with a laugh. "I wonder if there are any more hidden somewhere else."

"I guess not, if you leave out the snake."

"Say, it's lucky for that girl and her father, too, that the boa didn't smell them out, isn't it? It wouldn't have left much of either."

"That's so. Good Lord! if the reptile had gone into that cave it would have had things all its own way."

They got their load of shell-fish and hurried back.

The embers were ready to receive them, and a good supply intended for the girl and her father was added to what they thought they could eat themselves.

They didn't want coffee, but a pot of it was made to take to the inmates of the underground cave.

As soon as they finished their own dinner a procession of three, laden with what might be considered a swell meal for a bunch of castaways, took up their line of march under Dick's guidance for the coral rock beneath which lay the cave.

Dick had taken care to mark the spot where the hole lay so that he wouldn't fall into it again, as he preferred to enter of his own accord, and in a less rapid and undignified fashion than his first essay.

Lowering himself carefully through it, he called for the pot of coffee and the pan of shell-fish.

"Now, be careful, you fellows, and follow me with the rest of the stuff," he said, after which he disappeared.

Appearing at the inside opening to the cave, he found Josie Barnes singing a simple little song to her father.

The old man was listening with rapt attention, as if he understood it all.

The appearance of Dick brought the song to an abrupt conclusion, and Captain Barnes relapsed into his former attitude.

He seemed just as surprised to see the boy there as though this was Dick's first visit, and he showed alarm and anxiety for his daughter.

She quieted him with a word or two, but it was easy to see that he didn't like the boy to go too near his daughter.

Dick, however, didn't mind him, but set the fish and the pot of coffee down near the girl's couch.

At that moment Joe and Ben came through the opening, and the old captain's alarm became almost pitiful to look at.

It took all of Josie's firmness to partially quiet him down, and it was not until she pointed to the good dinner the boys had brought, and told him to eat with her, that he began to regard the visitors otherwise than as enemies.

Dick introduced his friends, and Josie said she was glad to know them.

The coffee produced a magical effect on the old captain. He hadn't tasted any since the morning of the day his schooner was lost on the reef, and he was always fond of the beverage.

The first taste of it seemed to puzzle him, as if he was trying to think when and where he had drunk the thing before.

He finished the contents of the tin cup with great satisfaction, and then looked at the pot, as if he had the idea there was more of it there.

Dick took up the pot and refilled his cup.

He took a sip to find out if it was the same thing, and finding that it was he gave many tokens of delight.

He smiled at Dick and held out his hand to him in a friendly way.

Thereafter he appeared to regard the boy with special favor, and did not seem to mind when Dick sat down close beside Josie.

The girl declared the shell-fish tasted fine, and also praised everything else the boys had brought with them.

She and her father made a hearty meal, and the visitors remained till the fading light warned them that the sun was close to the distant horizon, and that it was time for them to go.

"We'll drop around again to-morrow," said Dick, "and perhaps you will feel strong enough to let us carry you out into the air. Then you can go with us to our cave on the edge of the lagoon. We'll make a room for you to sleep in at the back of it, and during the daytime you can sit out in front in the sunshine, which ought to do you a lot of good."

Josie thanked him, but said she didn't want to give them any trouble.

"It will be no trouble, but quite a pleasure," replied the young castaway.

"You are very kind to say that," she replied, giving him a look that made his heart flutter a bit.

"Don't mention it," replied Dick. "It is our duty to do all we can for you, because being a girl you can't rough it like we can."

"Well, you must make me your housekeeper, then, and let me pay you back for your kindness."

"I guess there is no objection to that, is there, fellows?" asked Dick.

"No," answered Joe and Ben in a breath.

"All right, Miss Josie. We'll provide the supplies and you can attend to the cooking as soon as you feel able to look after it," said Dick. "There is one thing, and a very serious thing, too, that I forgot to tell you about."

"What is that?" asked the girl.

"There is a deadly boa constrictor, thirty feet long, at large on this island."

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed.

"It was brought here by the brig which carried Joe and Ben. It escaped to the shore at the time of the wreck. We've been constantly on the lookout for it, because it's a

dangerous neighbor. A canoe full of natives from an adjacent island landed here the other night. The snake captured one of them and that frightened the rest away. You must keep your father from wandering around in the vegetation, for he might run across the snake any time, and that would probably be the end of him. It is very lucky for you that it didn't nose this cave out, for if it had done so it would have made short work of one of you, at any rate."

Dick's words clearly disturbed Miss Barnes.

"I'm sure I won't sleep a wink while I remain here after what you have told me," she said.

"Don't be uneasy. I don't think the snake will trouble us for a week or two now, for it has a full stomach after gobbling up the native. We'll have you out of here long before we expect it will get lively again. Besides, we are hunting for it, and hope to kill it before long."

Dick then said good-by, and with his companions left the cave.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SOUTH SEA TEMPEST.

When they got into the open air Ben called the attention of the boys to the sky in the southeast.

It looked squally and portended a change in the weather.

"Looks as if we're going to have a storm," remarked Joe.

"If we don't I shall be much surprised," replied Ben. "I can feel it comin' in the air."

The light breeze then blowing died into a dead calm by the time they reached their own cave.

"There'll be plenty of wind before midnight," said Ben. "We must haul the rowboat close to the entrance and turn it over."

This job was soon accomplished, and then the boys got their supper.

"It would be a good idea to get in a fresh supply of cocoanuts," said Dick. "We're all out of them, and it might storm all day to-morrow so that we couldn't get any. As you are the best climber, Ben, I vote that you tackle the job."

"I'll do it, and while I'm about it you two gather a good supply of dried fuel and carry it into the cave, for when the rain comes it will soak everything in sight, and we might need a fire before the sun dries things out again."

Night was on them, but the sky was brilliant with stars except a patch of the firmament in the southeast, which looked dark and threatening.

The three got busy with their tasks, and in the course of half an hour had finished their work.

Ben lit his pipe and sat down outside the entrance, while the two boys lounged beside him.

"There's thunder and lightning in those clouds off yonder, and we'll have it hot and heavy when they reach this island," said Ben.

"Well, let it come. We'll be snug and dry in the cave," replied Dick in a tone of satisfaction.

"If a thunderbolt brought the coral roof tumbling about our heads we wouldn't find things quite so satisfactory as you are figurin' on."

"You don't think there's any danger of that, do you?" asked Joe with some concern.

"You can't tell what might happen. Thunderbolts often strike these islands and play the dickens with them. I landed on a small island a bit nearer the equator soon after a big storm had swept the ocean, and I saw where a great bunch of rock had been ripped into fragments by the lightnin'. If a bolt should ever hit this cave while we're in it, you can calculate that we won't live to worry about the damage done to it."

"That's pleasant, I must say," answered Joe. "Maybe we'd better go somewhere else."

"Where could we go?"

"Get into the boat and anchor ourselves in the middle of the lagoon."

"You'd wish you were out of that before the storm was a quarter over."

"It's likely to rain pretty hard, I guess," said Dick.

"It will come down in sheets," said Ben.

"Then I'm afraid Miss Barnes and her father stand a good show of being drowned. The vegetation won't stop the water from running down that incline and right into the inner cave."

"I wouldn't be surprised if a good rain would flood the cave."

"Then something ought to be done to prevent it. We ought to go over and warn the young lady of the approaching storm, and then see if we can't cover the entrance until the tempest is over," said Dick.

"What can we cover it with?" asked Joe.

"We've got some sailcloth here. That ought to go a long way toward keeping the water out."

"Well, wait till I finish my pipe and we'll try and fix them up," said Ben.

Twenty minutes later they stood before the coral rock with the sailcloth.

Dick went down to tell the girl about the coming gale.

She and her father were both asleep in the dark when the boy reached the inner opening.

Hearing no sound from them, Dick called out, and Josie woke up.

"Who's there?" she asked in a tone that showed she was a bit startled.

"I—Dick Danvers. I came to tell you that there's a big storm coming on from the sou'east. It is sure to rain like fun, and unless the entrance to this cave is covered you'll be drowned out."

"Oh, dear! what shall we do?" she replied.

"Ben and Joe are outside. We've brought over a piece of sailcloth which we are going to use to cover the opening up. It probably won't keep out the water entirely, but it ought to prevent most of it from coming down here. I thought I would let you know how things stand and what we're going to do. I guess you have enough to eat in case it storms so that we can't get over to-morrow. At any rate, we'll roll a few cocoanuts down the incline, where your father can get them if you want them, and then we'll batten you in."

"You're very good to take so much trouble on our account," replied Josie in a grateful tone.

"That's all right. It's our duty to take care of you both as well as we can. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dick Danvers. You're the best boy in the world."

"And you're the nicest girl in the world," returned Dick, as he turned away and rejoined his companions outside.

Half a dozen cocoanuts were procured and rolled down the incline, and then the mouth of the hole was covered up with the sailcloth, and two empty boxes were filled with sand and placed at either side to hold it in place.

A lot of vegetation was thrown upon the end that pressed against the rock itself, and then having done all they could the trio returned to their own quarters.

By this time a quarter of the sky was smothered by an inky pall that was riven by red streaks of lightning.

"The storm is coming up fast," said Joe. "It will be here in the course of a couple of hours from the looks of things."

The silence and dead calm surrounding the island at that moment were rather disquieting in view of the ominous aspect of the heavens in the southeast.

The feelings of the three were that of dread suspense which might not inaptly be compared in a small way to the sensation of a criminal in the electric chair as he waits for the shock that is to usher him into the next world.

They walked nervously up and down the beach, listening to the low mutterings of the distant thunder, and watching the brilliant streaks of electricity as it ripped its instantaneous course through the black atmosphere.

They stayed in the open until they heard the low hum of the oncoming tempest, and then they beat it for the shelter of the cave.

Ten minutes afterward the tempest struck the island, and it seemed as if old Boreas was spreading himself for their benefit.

The rain came down in torrents, the thunder crashed and the lightning lit up every nook and corner of the island.

The reefs broke the onrush of the sea, so that the surges did not reach the shore.

Nevertheless the encircling water was churned up pretty well by the wind, which carried it up on the beach.

As Ben and the boys gazed out through the opening in their inner barricade, they could see the tall palms bending over and flapping about under the terrible force of the wind, for the lightning was practically continuous.

It was an awful spectacle to contemplate even from their haven of shelter.

What was worse, however, was the possibility of their cave being struck by a thunderbolt.

This might happen at any moment, and the bare idea of such a calamity was quite sufficient to keep their nerves on edge.

The same catastrophe might have happened, too, had they been aboard a vessel at the mercy of the tempest.

On the whole they were much safer on the island, and they knew it.

It was in somewhat similar storms that Dick's bark, the Polly, and the brig that brought Joe and Ben from Batavia, in Java, had been lost, the one in mid-ocean and the other on the reefs of the island; and they were able to compare the difference between their sensations then and how they felt now.

At length they sought their bunks, Ben putting up with a blanket on the floor, and despite the uproar of the elements, dropped off to sleep.

How long Dick slept he couldn't tell, but he was awakened by a tremendous crash.

He sat bolt upright, with the din in his ears, half persuaded that the cave had been torn to pieces.

No such thing had happened, however.

He got up, went to the entrance and looked out into the lurid night.

As far as he could see no damage had been done by the thunderbolt in their immediate neighborhood.

Ben and Joe had also been aroused, and they came up behind him.

"Where did the bolt strike?" asked the former.

"I can't tell you," replied Dick.

"I thought the island had been knocked to pieces," said Joe.

"No; it seems to be all here, as far as I can see."

"I'll bet we'll find some damage done after the storm is over."

"I hope nothing has happened to the cave where Miss Barnes and her father are," said Dick with an anxious look. "It would be fierce if they were wiped out."

"It would that. There is only one thing I'd like to see wiped out and that is the snake, but we need expect no such luck," replied Joe.

"That's right," said Dick. "It is only the good that die young."

"Then you and I may expect to see our finish at any moment," laughed Joe.

"A pretty pair of angels you two would make," sniffed Ben.

"Sailors don't turn into angels, Ben—they turn into Mother Cary's chickens. I thought you knew that," said Dick.

"Oh, that's all rot," replied Ben. "Do you think I believe that?"

"I'll gamble on it that you wouldn't kill a stormy petrel for a small gold mine," answered Dick.

"Would you?"

"No, I wouldn't, though I don't believe in the superstition attached to them."

"You don't, eh?"

"No. Nobody killed one of the birds on our bark, and yet the Polly foundered in a storm just the same."

"Maybe you sailed from 'Frisco on a Friday?"

"No, we didn't. Did your brig sail from Batavia on a Friday?"

"Not much."

"Well, you see if you're going to have hard luck you'll have it anyway. Come, let's turn in again. No good of standing here watching the storm."

They returned behind the barracks, and before long were asleep again.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### AFTER THE STORM.

They slept late that morning.

When they turned out the worst of the storm had passed away.

It was still raining cats and dogs, to use the expression, and the morning was dark and gloomy.

They could hear the roar of the surf on the near-by reefs, rising and falling like the hollow notes of a great organ in a cathedral playing a slow and somber tune.

The wind was blowing half a gale, and the prospect altogether was not cheerful.

"It's a fierce morning and likely to be a fierce day," said Joe after surveying the prospects outside.

"I'll bet it is," replied Dick.

"Bring some of that dry vegetation here and we'll make a small fire near the entrance," said Ben. "We'll make a pot of coffee and roast the balance of the shell-fish for breakfast."

"No treasure-hunting to-day," said Joe.

"I should say not" replied Dick. "It doesn't matter; we have loads of time ahead."

After breakfast they stood near the entrance, watched the rain and conversed on different topics.

As the hours went by time began to hang heavy on their hands.

Along toward noon the rain eased up and they went outside to take a look around.

There was nothing particular to see except dampness and a general air of depression.

They walked out to the shore and then around toward the coral rock above the cave where Josie Barnes and her father were.

Removing the canvas covering the hole, Dick went down to see how the two were getting on.

The inner cave was very gloomy, as but little light came through the coral on such a dark day.

"Hello!" cried Dick, poking his head through the opening. "How are you getting on, Miss Josie?"

"Very nicely under the circumstances. No water came in on us, though it did rain something awful all night and all this morning. The thunder and lightning was something dreadful, wasn't it? And there was one terrible crash during the night that gave me a great fright. I couldn't sleep after that for hours."

"Well, I'm glad you're all right. Is there anything we can do for you now?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"As the weather still looks dirty, and the rain may come on any minute again, we will replace the covering over the hole. We will be back again as soon as it clears up."

Dick then returned to the surface, the canvas was put back and they walked back to their cave in a drizzle.

Hardly had they got under cover before it began to rain in torrents again.

It kept up with more or less persistency until after dark.

The wind by that time had dropped to a strong breeze, and the clouds showed signs of breaking away.

When they turned in a few stars were visible.

Next morning the shone bright, the air was fresh and bracing, only a slight wind rippled the waters, and there was little surf on the reefs.

Fragments of a recent wreck were tossed by the little surf that remained, and many articles were lying along the beach which had landed during the night.

The boys hastened to secure these various articles, which,

however, were of little value; and they afterward got many more as they floated ashore.

"Some vessel has gone to kingdom come," said Joe, "and her officers and crew with her."

"Doesn't seem to be any doubt about that," replied Dick. "I think I'll quit the sea for good once I am safe in the United States again. It is altogether too risky for the money that's in it."

"I agree with you there. If we can only find that pirate's gold we'll be well fixed for the rest of our lives."

"I should say we will, but I'm not very confident of finding it. We've hunted the island over pretty well, and have not met with very good luck in locating any of the landmarks mentioned in that parchment. I'm afraid that most of them have been destroyed by time and the storms that sweep these seas. The treasure must have been hidden here nearly a hundred years ago, and it is probable that one of the pirates made that memorandum for his personal information. The man Bill, now the skeleton in the hut, would have been up against it as bad as ourselves if his life had been spared long enough for him to make the search that brought him to the island, though it is true he came here many years ago, when some of the marks might have still been in evidence," said Dick.

During the morning Dick and Joe went over to the coral rock, tore away the canvas from the hole and went down into the cave.

They found Josie sitting up, and the cave full of reflected sunshine.

"Good-morning, Miss Josie," said Dick cheerfully. "You're looking quite chipper. You must be feeling better after the storm."

"I am, thank you," she answered.

"How about moving over to our cave? Do you think you can manage it? This is no place for you. You want to get out into the air and sunlight. It will make all the difference in the world with you."

"I shall be glad to get away from this place," she said. "I've been here a little over six weeks now, and I am heartily tired of it."

"Then let us help you make a move at once. We'll assist you up through the hole, and your father can follow," said Dick.

"I'm ready to go, for I feel quite strong this morning."

"Then come on. We need delay no longer. Go ahead, Joe, and I will lift the young lady up to you when I get her to the hole."

Old Captain Barnes came up and shook hands with the young castaway.

That pot of coffee seemed to have made Dick solid with him, and he did not forget it as he did other things.

He understood that he and his daughter were about to leave the cave, and he associated the welcome change with Dick.

Although Josie said that her leg was quite strong again, nevertheless she felt obliged to lean on Dick as they went up the incline.

He on his part assisted her along firmly, but gently, and thus they reached the foot of the hole which had been the cause of her misfortune.

Dick got a good hold on her and then lifted her up to

Joe, who, bracing himself outside, landed her in the glorious sunshine.

"How good it feels to be in the air once more!" she cried joyfully, as she inhaled the invigorating breeze and held her arms out to the sun's rays.

"I'll bet it does," replied Dick, who then turned to give his hand to her father.

The old man hardly needed his aid, for he was strong and hearty in every way except in his head, and probably time would right that, too.

The party walked over to the other cave, the girl enjoying every moment of the walk.

It was plain to be seen that she had taken a strong fancy for Dick, as she kept close to him and permitted him to help her over all the uneven places along their way.

Dick, too, was greatly taken with her.

She looked prettier than ever, now that the bracing air brought a flush into her heretofore pale face.

Ben was busy hauling various flotsam from the shore to the cave when they arrived.

He had secured a lot of good wood with which they would be able to screen off a section of the cave for the girl's exclusive use.

Josie seated herself in the sun and watched the work, in which Dick and Joe also took a hand.

Her father sat beside her, and also seemed to take considerable interest in what was going on.

When everything in sight had been secured, dinner was got ready, and they made quite a merry party as they sat around in the sand and ate it.

The afternoon was spent in fixing the back of the cave for the girl's reception.

They had the job completed before sundown, and then there was nothing to do but get supper.

The evening was so fine that they sat up until the clock pointed to the hour of ten.

Dick told the girl all about the skeleton in the hut in the little grove of palm trees on the other side of the channel, and how in going through the ancient sea-chest, which had belonged to the dead man, he had found a letter and a piece of parchment that indicated the existence of a pirate's treasure on the atoll.

She was greatly interested in the story.

Dick then told her about their fruitless attempts to find the landmarks spoken about in the parchment.

"We mean to keep on hunting for them as long as our patience holds out. The prize in view is certainly worth a whole lot of effort. I am in hopes that ultimately we shall light on the treasure, even if it is by accident," he said.

"I am sure I hope you will. It would be a grand thing to find a lot of money, though it would be of no use to you till you were taken off the island," said Josie. "You have my best wishes for your sake, and I would gladly help you in any way I could if it was possible for me to be of any use to you."

"You can't very well help us in the treasure hunt, but you can keep house for us and have our meals ready when we come back in the intervals of our quest."

Josie assured him that she would do her part in that respect, and then saying that she was feeling sleepy after the past night's wakefulness, she retired to her own quar-

ters, while the others turned in, too, after building the usual fire, leaving Joe to stand first watch.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN THE FOLDS OF THE PYTHON.

After breakfast on the following morning, Dick, Joe and Ben started out to renew their hunt for the pirate's gold, though not near so sanguine of results as they had been at first.

On getting around to the north shore of the island Joe and Ben thought they saw signs in the shrubbery of the recent presence of the boa constrictor.

As Ben had the rifle and Joe carried the revolver, they stopped to investigate, while Dick went on ahead.

They soon lost sight of each other, but as they were within call that did not matter.

Dick had gone on perhaps three hundred yards, when he saw where the thunderbolt had struck the island.

It had evidently come in a diagonal direction, for a great mass of shrubbery which he and his companions had noticed during their search had been swept away as clean as though shaved off by a razor.

To Dick's amazement it left exposed and facing the shore a great wide square opening in a wall of coral rock which had clearly been shaped by the hand of man.

Rushing up to it Dick saw before him two wide steps to aid descent into the place.

The sunshine was pouring in through the door and lighted up the interior of the artificial cave.

"By George! This must be the hiding place of the pirate's gold," cried Dick excitedly. "We've passed here several times within a few feet of it and yet the entrance was concealed so naturally by the shrubbery that we never thought of investigating it. The lightning has done for us what the parchment never would have done. Now to investigate the inside and see if the treasure is still here. If it is I guess the three of us will be pretty well fixed when we get back to civilization."

Dick dashed down the steps into the cave.

He found himself in a small square room which had been fashioned out of a solid mass of coral rock.

The door which had guarded the entrance lay in splinters all over the floor, in the center of which was a ragged gaping hole that appeared to have no bottom.

Dick judged that many years before the door had been struck by lightning, and that the bolt had carved its way through the floor.

Another door, communicating with an inner door or hole, had fallen inward on its hinges, and lay across a grawsome object—a moldering skeleton.

The yellow skull grinned sardonically into Dick's startled face, as if mocking his presence in that place.

Turning away from the unpleasant sight, the young castaway saw two big chests, one on either side of the doorway.

Each was almost full of tarnished pieces of round metal, which the boy judged to be money.

He uttered a series of wild whoops at the sight, and hopped about like an Indian executing a war dance.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! The pirate's gold! The pirate's gold! We're all rich for life!"

He rushed up the steps and shouted to his companions. Joe answered him from a distance, and he and Ben hurried forward.

Impatient to handle the coins that represented so much worldly wealth, Dick jumped back into the cave, and kneeling beside one of the boxes began to scoop up the coins, letting them run between his fingers and jingle on the floor.

Then he darted to the second chest and scooped up the money in that.

While he was thus employed an ugly, flat-shaped head, attached to a long, shiny and spotted neck, poked itself between the skeleton head and the door.

A thin forked tongue shot in and out with lightning-like rapidity from its red and slimy mouth.

Its glassy eyes fastened themselves on the kneeling form of the boy, who, unconscious of the presence of this horrible object, gloated over the jingling coin, and thrust his hands deep into the yielding mass.

It was the boa constrictor, or rather a python, which differs from the true boa in having the plates on the under surface of the tail double.

These reptiles are all large and all native of the Old World.

Joe had told Dick that this particular specimen was thirty feet long, but he had only guessed at it, for it was really eighteen feet.

The python gazed at Dick with greedy eyes for some moments as if sizing up just what kind of a meal the boy would make, and then began to glide through the opening toward him.

As the sunlight glinted on its body it was seen to be rather brilliantly colored; its body being covered with gold and black, finely intermixed.

Its forehead was marked with a longitudinal brown stripe.

Not a sound marked its insidious approach.

It intended to give its prey no warning.

When it got within striking distance of the boy it raised its head and neck high in the air, poised itself for the fatal spring and then threw itself on its victim, encircling him in an incredibly short time with three of its powerful folds.

The impetus of its movement dragged the dazed boy away from the box of coin to the space immediately in front of the entrance.

The moment Dick realized that he was in the grasp of the snake he uttered a terrified scream for help.

He seized the slimy folds of the python's neck with his disengaged arms and tried to push it away from him.

He might as well have tried to stem the inrush of the tide upon the shore.

He was utterly powerless to do anything for his own salvation.

"Help! Help!" he shouted with all the strength of his lungs, but no help appeared at that moment in answer to his frantic cries.

The snake began to swing its head a foot or so above his face, trying to catch his eyes and fascinate him, as was its nature to do before proceeding further.

Dick, wrapped completely in the folds of the python, gave himself up for lost.

At that moment Joe, followed by Ben, appeared at the opening.

Taking in the situation, he pulled out his revolver and fired at the serpent's head.

The bullet, although hastily fired, struck the reptile plumb in one eye and penetrated its brain, killing it instantly.

Instead of contracting its huge folds, which would have crushed Dick into a shapeless pulp, it relaxed them, for its nerve center had been shattered.

The boy, feeling the loosening of the bonds that encircled him, struggled frantically to save himself.

In this he was assisted by Joe, who fired a second ball into the nerveless head, and then seizing one of Dick's arms dragged him free of the squirming body, which still retained a powerful amount of vitality.

Dick, white as a sheet, tried to stagger to his feet, but the effort was a failure.

The shock had been too much for him and he fell over in a dead faint.

Ben, not sure that the snake was dead, blew its head in pieces with his rifle, and then he and Joe grabbed up Dick and rushed him down to the shore, where the latter began bathing the young castaway's face with cool water.

This revived him in a few minutes.

Dick's thoughts, however, were with the snake.

He thought himself still in peril and he screamed twice for help before he woke up to the fact that it was Joe bending over him and not the python.

"Good Lord!" he fluttered with ashen lips, and trembling all over as if with the ague. "Am I alive? Where is that snake?"

"Dead," replied Joe laconically.

"Dead!" gasped Dick, looking around.

"As a coffin nail," laughed Joe. "Brace up, old fellow, you're safe. His snakeship is out of business for good, I'm thankful to say, and after this we can rest in peace."

"You saved my life, Joe," said Dick.

"I guess I did. But what of it? You'd have done the same for me had our positions been reversed."

"I can't thank you enough."

"Don't try to. You're welcome. How did the thing catch you?"

"I don't know. It came on me before I had the faintest idea it was around. It must have been hiding in that room."

"What room are you talking about—the one we found you in?"

"No; the other one, where the skeleton is."

"What skeleton?"

"Didn't you see it?"

"No."

"But you saw the chests of money?"

"Chests of money! What chests?"

"Two chests chock full of yellow coin—the pirate's gold."

"The pirate's gold!" echoed Joe and Ben with one voice.

"Yes. I've found it—I've found it, and we're all rich—rich as Indian moguls! Hurrah!"

The excitement in his weak state overcame him, and he fell back into Joe's arms and stared straight out at the

glittering blue ocean that danced in its yellow brightness like millions and millions of heaving golden coins.

## CHAPTER XV.

### FIGURING ON THE PIRATE'S GOLD.

Joe and Ben looked at each other.

"Do you think his fright has made him light in the head, or did he really find the gold?" said Joe.

"I'll find out in two shakes of a lamb's tail," replied Ben, making a break for the entrance of the artificial cave.

He darted down the steps and looked around him.

The grinning skeleton, half-concealed under the broken door, first attracted his gaze.

"Another dead man on the island," he muttered. "Probably we'll find enough of them before we leave to start a cemetery."

The python at his feet had ceased to squirm.

Ben kicked it into the hole in the floor and it disappeared into the depths.

Then he saw the two boxes, and it needed but a glance to show him that they were well filled with coins.

Dick had displaced most of the tarnished ones which had lain on top, and now the bright yellow fellows glittered before the sailor's eyes.

He fairly flung himself on one of the chests and grabbed handful after handful of the gold and looked at it with a miser's eagerness.

"There must be thousands on thousands of dollars' worth here," he cried in a hoarse whisper. "And it's all ours—ours. But Dick will claim the most. We agreed to give him half. We ought to have made it thirds all around. Half of all this is more than he could spend if he lived to be an old man. We saved his life, so he ought to divide even. Yes, yes, he ought to divide even."

While he was muttering to himself and bending over the chest Joe and Dick entered the place, and then for the first time Deering saw the chests of gold coin and he uttered a shout of joy.

Dick was now fully recovered.

"Where's the snake, Ben?" he asked, looking fearfully around as if he feared it might be hiding again and waiting to spring out on them.

"Down in that hole," replied the sailor.

"Thank goodness, it's gone for good. This must have been its hiding place, and I walked right into its nest, and was an easy victim. Well, let's see if there is more treasure where the skeleton is," said Dick.

The possibility of securing more treasure brought Ben on his feet like a shot.

Had the room been full of gold he still would have been eager for more.

He had never been blessed with much worldly wealth in his life, and he thirsted for it as a parched wanderer in the desert thirsts for a drink of cold water.

He sprang ahead of Dick and wrenched the door aside without the least bit of respect for the skeleton.

The result was that the bones crumbled into small fragments and particles of dust, while the skull rolled aside.

There was nothing in the hole, which was but a small one, and Dick and Joe wondered why the skeleton was there.

Nailed on the outer side of the door was a piece of parchment on which was scrawled in huge, almost illegible letters, "The fate of a traitor!"

"Ha!" cried Dick. "I see now. That poor fellow was nailed up in there and left to perish miserably of starvation as a warning to the rest of the pirates. The buccaneers were a tough set. No doubt Providence avenged this man's death. The rascals who put him in there were probably captured and hanged, with the possible exception of the chap who wrote the directions on the parchment in my pocket. That fate prevented them from returning to recover their treasure, while a different fate overtook the other rascal. We need have no fear of taking possession of the money, since Heaven has uncovered it for our benefit by that lightning bolt. But for that we might have hunted around here for a long time before we got on to this place."

"Now, how are we going to carry this money away from the island when some vessel puts in here so that the people on the vessel won't get on to the fact that the stuff we ship is hard cash?" asked Dick.

"If we pack it tight in those small boxes containing the canned goods we have at the cave no one could tell the nature of their contents," replied Joe.

"Consider the weight of this gold. Those boxes won't be strong enough to stand handling. If one of them broke on the vessel that would give the whole of them away, and then everybody aboard would want a whack out of the treasure," said Dick.

"Use twice as many boxes as necessary and only half fill them with money, filling in with dried grass. That would keep the coins from rattling around."

"That isn't a bad idea," nodded Dick. "We'll put a lot of extra nails in the boxes to help hold them together. I'll tell you what we'll do first. Experiment with one box, and see how much of the coin we can put into it without making it too heavy to handle easily. Dried grass will make a first-class packing material, and there is no lack of it around here."

"We'll row over with a couple of boxes this afternoon," replied Joe, "and experiment."

"We are goin' to divide up first, aren't we?" put in Ben, who had listened impatiently to their conversation. "Then each of us can look after his own share."

"I think it would be better to ship it all as it is and divide after we reach our destination. What do you say, Joe?" said Dick.

"That suits me," answered Deering.

It didn't suit Ben, however.

He wanted his share on the spot, and he added that he thought the original agreement ought to be changed to thirds all around.

"What for?" asked Joe. "An agreement is an agreement. I'm willing to stand by the original agreement. We never would have known there was a treasure on the island but for Dick. Besides, he found it himself. He is fairly entitled to half, and I shall back up his claim to it."

"We saved his life, didn't we?" growled Ben. "If that snake had done him up he would have no use for any of the gold."

"I'm willing to call it thirds," said Dick. "I'm not go-

ing to scrap over it. A third of this treasure is enough for anybody."

"No," replied Joe in a decided tone. "It isn't a fair deal. We three made a certain agreement how we would divide up in case we found the pirate's gold. We have found it. Well, I won't take a cent more than a quarter, and Ben has no right to, either."

"But if Ben isn't satisfied——"

"He's got to be satisfied. If he wants his quarter now let him have it. I'll let my quarter go in with yours, and we'll separate our shares later on. The fact that you and I, Ben, saved Dick's life has no bearing on the case at all, and it isn't the right thing to throw it in his face. It was our duty to save him. If it comes down to the fine point I was first on the spot and killed the snake. Dick would have done as much for either of us under like circumstances, and I am rather surprised that you should make a point out of it," said Joe.

"All right. I'll take a quarter," grumbled the sailor. "Who's to count the stuff?"

"There's two chests. One is a little fuller than the other. Notice that?" said Dick.

"Yes," replied Ben.

"I'll take the smaller chest just as it is for my share, and you and Ben take the larger one. That will give you each a big quarter of the whole. Is that satisfactory?"

"Suits me," said Ben, somewhat mollified to find that he was going to get a little more than an exact quarter. "Let's divide the stuff now, Joe."

"No, wait till we bring the boxes around, and then make one job of it," replied Deering.

"We might as well return to the cave now," said Dick. "We can look over the boxes before dinner, and get three of them ready for filling. Then we need lose no time after we have had the meal."

Dick's suggestion was agreed to, and they left the pirate's storehouse and started for the channel, where they had moored their boat after coming across.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CONCLUSION.

When they reached the cave they found that Josie had made many improvements in the interior.

Her father had brought in a supply of shell-fish, and she was just starting a fire to cook them.

"We've found the pirate's gold, Miss Josie," said Dick, smilingly.

"Have you really?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, two good-sized chests full of gold coin. At least we suppose they are full of coin, for they look like it."

"My gracious! I'd like to go and see them. Couldn't you take me?"

"Of course we could and we will. You shall go along when we go back there after dinner. We're going to take some boxes along to pack a part of it in."

"What do you suppose, Miss Josie?" chipped in Joe. "We ran across that snake and he nearly made a meal of Dick."

The girl looked startled, and her eyes sought Dick's.

"That's right," nodded the young castaway. "Joe saved my life. The boa had me dead to rights with three

coils around my body. Had not Joe showed up just in the nick of time you'd never have seen me again."

"Oh, Dick Danvers!" she cried, the tears coming into her eyes.

Dick told her how he had found the gold, and while looking at it the snake had sneaked upon him and grabbed him quicker than a wink.

"I'll never forget those few minutes as long as I live," he said. "It was a terrible experience. No one can imagine the awful sensation of feeling oneself in the vise-like grasp of a great snake. You've got to experience it to understand it."

All hands turned in and helped along dinner, as Ben and the boys were anxious to get back to the treasure.

Immediately after the meal three small canned goods boxes were examined and renailed to make them stronger.

They were placed in the rowboat, and as there wasn't room for the four also, it was arranged that Joe should take Dick and Josie across the channel and land them, after which he was to return for Ben, and they were to row around to the cave where the treasure was, while Dick and the girl would walk there, the distance not being far.

Josie was taken into the cave, and was much astonished at the apparent extent of the treasure.

"You can help me fill my box, Miss Josie," said Dick. "We'll count the money as we go on, though being French and Spanish gold pieces as far as I can see, it will be impossible to compute their exact value. They look to be about the size of an American \$10 piece, and we can estimate their value at that rate."

Dick first got a big bunch of grass and made a thick bed of it at the bottom of the box, then he and the girl counted out 1,000 coins in two piles.

"We'll call that \$10,000," he said, placing the coins in the box.

He put in another thick layer of grass and they counted out a second 1,000 gold pieces and put them in, too.

The box was now as heavy as Dick cared to carry, so he filled the rest of the box in with grass, packing it down tight, put on the cover and nailed it down.

"There, I call that a good job," he said. "How are you chaps coming on?" he added, turning to his associates.

They were coming on slowly.

"How much have you in your boxes now?" Dick inquired.

Joe told him.

"Well, 2,000 coins are as much as you want to put in a box. You'll find that is as heavy as you can carry a short distance without strain."

The boxes when ready were carried to the boat, and the party set out to return, Dick and Josie walking as before.

After landing the boxes in front of the cave, Joe returned across the channel for Dick and the girl, who were waiting for him.

They prepared three more boxes for next morning, after which Dick and Joe rowed out to the reef and caught a mess of fish for supper.

Next day they visited the treasure cave twice and brought away \$60,000 each time.

They repeated the performance until Ben and Joe had emptied their box and secured about \$90,000 between them.

Dick boxed \$10,000 for Josie out of his share and still had about \$150,000 for himself.

Having secured the whole of the pirate's gold, and got it all ready for transportation, the party turned their attention toward the sea, on the lookout for a vessel to take them and their riches to civilized parts.

Day by day passed, and week followed week, and still they were no nearer rescue than the day they had come ashore.

Josie and her father had now been a year on the island, Joe and Ben four months, and Dick three months.

"This is getting decidedly monotonous," said Joe one evening, as they sat in front of their cave. "Our provisions are exhausted, though of course we can't starve with plenty of fish and fruit in sight, and we will no longer be able to vary our diet with canned goods as we have hitherto done. Our matches won't last forever, and when they are gone we won't be able to cook the fish. Our clothes are getting in bad shape, too. If a vessel doesn't turn up soon I don't know where we will arrive."

Next day the weather looked threatening, and the day after a fierce gale blew the ocean into a mass of yeasty foam.

It moderated during the night, and a clear sky and sunshine greeted the castaways when they turned out in the morning.

Dick, Joe and Ben took a stroll along shore after a meager breakfast.

"Look yonder!" cried Dick, pointing to the beach near where he came ashore himself three months since. "There's a craft of some kind—looks like a small sloop which has drifted in through the reef entrance."

With one accord they started on a run toward her.

She was lying half afloat on the beach.

There was not the least sign of life aboard of her, though she did not appear to be greatly damaged as far as they could make out.

They climbed aboard of her and examined her fore and aft.

She was fairly well provisioned for a small crew and skipper, though the grade of provisions was not very high.

Everything was intact about her, and the boys could not understand why she had been abandoned, or if not abandoned how she had lost all her people.

There she was, however, all ready to continue her cruise, and the trio decided after a short consultation to leave the island in her with the treasure and sail straight east for the coast of South America.

They had no trouble in getting her off the beach, and hoisting the mainsail they made for the channel in front of their cave.

Josie was greatly astonished to see the sloop, as well as the boys on board of her and in possession.

Dick told her how they came by the vessel and informed her that they intended to leave the island in her.

She said she was delighted at the chance to get away.

That noon they sat down to a better dinner than usual, but it was noticed that Josie's father was missing.

"Where did he go?" asked Dick.

"I guess he's over in that cocoanut grove," she said. "He likes to go there and look out at sea. I'm going to run over and bring him to dinner."

"No, I'll go," said Dick.

It was not far and Dick soon reached the grove.

There he found the old captain senseless on the ground. He had fallen and struck his head.

Dick yelled for Joe, and Josie, fearing something had happened to her father, accompanied him to the spot.

The two boys bore the captain to the shore and bathed his head with water.

In a short time he came to his senses.

Then, wonderful to relate, it was discovered that his memory and right senses had come back to him.

Of course there was much rejoicing over the fact, and the old captain had a lot to learn from his daughter about all they had gone through since they were wrecked on the island, of which he had only an uncertain recollection.

In the meantime Ben and the boys got their treasure aboard the sloop and made all preparations for departure.

Captain Barnes was naturally asked to take charge, with Ben as his mate, while Dick and Joe were to act as crew.

They left the island at sunrise the next morning, and in a week, with fair weather, sighted the coast of South America.

They then continued northward, stopping whenever they needed provisions.

In due time they reached the coast of California, and one morning passed through the Golden Gate into San Francisco Bay.

Captain Barnes and Josie went at once to the home of a near relative, while Ben and the boys went to a cheap hotel for the time being.

They had a small bagful of golden coins which they changed at a money broker's, and with the proceeds purchased new outfits.

Then they arranged with the mint to take their treasure at its valuation in gold.

Ben and Joe received \$80,000 each, while Dick's share amounted to \$140,000.

Ben left for the East as soon as he got his money, but Joe remained in San Francisco and went into business with Dick.

Dick became a steady caller on Josie, and in the course of three years they were married, Joe Deering acting as best man for his friend and partner.

Both Dick and Joe are men of middle age to-day, and the days of their sojourn on the coral island are but a remembrance, but if they should live to be a hundred they will never forget their hunt for a pirate's gold.

THE END.

Read "THE LITTLE MONEY MAKER; OR, THE WALL STREET BOY WHO SAVED THE MARKET," which will be the next number (192) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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## GOOD STORIES.

From Madrid comes the report of a shower of meteorites near Burgos on December 27, 1908. Five of the meteorites, which set fire to a farmhouse, were collected. They were found to weigh from 2 to 11 pounds each, and to have a crystallized internal structure, while the surface was covered by the blade crust which is characteristic of meteorites and is produced by the partial fusion of the outer layer by the heat generated in traversing the earth's atmosphere.

When the new Empress-Dowager had finished performing the libationary sacrifices to the memory of the late Empress-Dowager on the completion of one whole month from her death the chief imperial concubine of the late Emperor, at the head of the wives and the imperial Princess, solemnly proceeded to place in the burning pond and to burn the following articles belonging to her late Majesty: Her pearl pendant hat, her chaplet of pearl beads, her gayly ornamented and embossed clothes, her bedding in ordinary use and her yellow and red silk cushions and mattresses. Her carts, sedans and other unwieldy objects were at the same time separately burned on the banks of the palace lake.

"Why did you tell the manager of that employment agency that you had just come over?" said one servant girl to another. "You didn't, you know. You have had three situations in New York." "I know that," said the girl. "I pretended to be green so she would try harder to get me a good place. At most of these agencies the managers have green girls on their conscience. The sharks in the business of course will fleece them, but the average manager is sympathetic and gets them easy places to start with. I'll have a snap where I am going. The woman thinks I have just arrived, and that she will have to break me in. Breaking in means that she will do half the work while I will just stand around and look on. It pays, sometimes, to be a greenhorn."

Short and odd lengths of lumber is the subject of a brief bulletin sent out by the United States Forest Service. It is stated that 25 per cent of the felled trees are never hauled from the woods simply because specifications of builders and architects cling to conventional lengths, whereas the actual construction is such as easily to use the short and odd lengths. The work of a prominent architect was examined and it was found that 40 per cent of the siding on frame buildings was under 6 feet in length. It was found that in cutting and grading finished lumber generally 5 to 10 per cent, was bound to come in lengths under 10 feet, of which all under 6 feet is

burned and all over is sold at reduced prices. This bulletin asks for closer specifications, better understanding of the timber situation as a help to the lumbermen and for the preservation of the lumber supply.

The magnet that boys of yesterday used for a toy to-day as men they are employing as a useful instrument in their workshops. Within the last few years particularly, as W. Frank McClure points out, it is being adapted to handle many shapes of metal, all forms of iron and steel, from iron dust to scraps, or small junk to weights of 20,000 pounds. In fact, the world's largest magnets will lift as much as 50,000 pounds. The magnet is employed to break up imperfect castings, to hold sheets of metal in position while they are being riveted in the building of ships, to lift a "sow and pigs" at the furnaces, also as a gigantic broom to sweep both the large and small pieces of iron, and in numerous other ways. Half a dozen kegs of nails may be seen traveling through the air, held by magnetic lines of force, despite the wooden covering of the kegs. Even two or three men are sometimes lifted from the ground, their feet resting on a metal sheet which is firmly held by the magnet. The flat style of magnet is available for picking up metal sheets, from two to six at a time, one under the other, the number depending upon their thickness. These may be dropped by the magnet one at a time at the desire of the operator, provided he is clever in adjusting the switch at precisely the right intervals.

## JOKES AND JESTS.

Gerald—There, that fellow died at second base. Geraldine—Will they have to send for the medical examiner?

Visitor—Is this lake in your garden artificial? Child of the House—No, sir-ee. It's real. I fell in and got as wet as anything.

First Actress—Have you had a successful season? Second Actress—Not very; I have had harder work than usual to get my diamonds stolen.

"Did your ancestors have a family tree, Mr. Maguire?" "Family tree, is it, ma'am? One of me ancestors controlled th' intire privilege of the Garden of Eden."

The host was one of the newly rich of the vainglorious kind, and he was explaining to his dinner guests the cost of the dessert. "This pineapple, f'r instance, cost me \$12, and—er—Mr. Jones, can I offer you a slice?" "Yes, sir, you may," rejoined Jones. "I will take about 35 cents' worth."

Old Mr. Flaherty was a general favorite in the little town where he lived. The doctor was away all one summer and did not hear of the old man's death. Soon after his return he met Miss Flaherty and inquired about the family, ending with: "And how is your father standing the heat?"

A country clergyman, on his round of visits interviewed a youngster as to his old acquaintance with Bible stories. "My lad," he said, "you have, of course, heard of the parables?" "Yes, sir," shyly answered the boy, whose mother had inducted him in sacred history. "Yes, sir." "Good!" said the clergyman. "Now, which of them do you like best of all?" The boy squirmed, but at last, heeding his mother's frowns, he replied: "I guess I like that one where somebody loaf and fishes."

## MISJUDGED

By Kit Clyde.

Without the wind was howling, dashing the heavy rain in furious gusts against the door and windows, and ever and anon causing the rickety old building to shake and quiver throughout every timber from roof-tree to foundation.

Abner Moncton shrugged his shoulders and drew nearer to the huge fireplace, where great logs of white oak crackled and blazed, and threw out a genial heat that speedily dried his dampened garments.

His old luck had not forsaken him. Instead of a shelterless night in the pitiless storm, he was safely housed, a good supper was being prepared for his especial benefit, and noiselessly flitting to and fro as she spread the table, was one of the most beautiful women mortal eyes ever looked upon.

Though her dress was of homespun, and hung loosely around her tall, queenly figure, Abner Moncton could not but admit this, and his eyes followed her movements with a wondering, almost reverential admiration.

Surely, she could not be akin to these people, to that withered old crone in the corner nodding over her black pipe, to those three men, evidently father and sons? She seemed a princess in disguise; they rough, ignorant, brutal.

Abner caught himself recalling the many tales of ruthless crime and wanton cruelty that were current concerning that section of Missouri.

The men looked capable of any crime, and he fancied, too, that the oldest was keeping a close and even anxious watch over every movement of the young woman.

That there was some mystery he felt convinced. Could it be that, in fleeing from the storm, he had rushed blindly into a still greater peril?

Instinctively his hand sought out the fat wallet in his breast, where lay hidden a sum of money that would have seemed a princely fortune to these men. A peculiar chill ran along his spinal column as he caught the keen black eyes of the old man fixed upon his rash motion. The three bushy heads drew together in eager, guarded converse, varied by quick, covert glances in his direction.

Supper was announced, but Moncton suddenly lost his keen appetite. Yet he forced himself to eat, lest suspicion should be aroused in the minds of his sinister-looking hosts. They were still whispering, still watching him covertly.

The young woman as she poured out his coffee for a moment shut off their view, and, without moving her lips, whispered:

"Beware! Your life is in danger! They mean to drug and then murder you!"

How Abner Moncton managed to control his features and eat on without giving any signs of the sickening horror that filled his heart at this terrible confirmation of his worst fears he could never tell. He only saw that the three men were watching him more closely than ever, and that at a sign from the eldest the old woman came forward, and pushing the girl aside, assumed the position of waiter herself.

"You don't eat, stranger," observed the old man as Moncton pushed back his chair from the table. "Mebbe you ain't feelin' well? You look aguey about the gills."

Abner muttered something about getting wet, but the old man did not pay any attention.

"Mother," he said—and Moncton fancied he could detect a hidden meaning in the words—"fetch out the jug. A dose o' that'll fix the gen'leman."

He was obeyed. The old woman, however, paused at the

rude cupboard and Abner distinctly saw her empty a small paper into a china mug before filling it up with whisky.

The warning so impressively given him now returned to him with redoubled force, and Moncton cast a swift glance toward the door. But one stalwart son was just beside it, reaching down a rifle from the wall. Any attempt at flight would only precipitate the climax. He was completely at their mercy.

With a hideous grin that showed her toothless gums, the old hag approached Moncton, and, while her husband grasped the jug, she extended the mug.

"Drink hearty, stranger," laughed the old man. "Hyar's a good sound sleep, an' a pleasant wakin'."

With a mad impulse Moncton raised his hands to dash the drugged liquor aside, when, with a sharp cry, the young woman brushed quickly before him, and Abner could barely suppress a shout of joy as he saw the cup fall to the floor before the fireplace into atoms.

The girl stooped before the fireplace and brushed back a coal that had snapped out upon the floor. Quick as thought Abner improved the chance she had given him, and slipping the jug from the hand of the settler, he raised it to his lips and drank a portion of its contents.

In a short time the young woman lighted a tallow dip, and as she passed Abner, whispered:

"Go quietly! Do nothing until I come!"

"We're airy birds, stranger," said the old man, rising. "Unless you'd rather set up, I reckon we'll turn in now. Jeems, show the gen'leman upstairs."

"An' look to the shetter afore ye come down. The rain comes powerful fierce from that-a-way," added the mother.

Moncton followed James with a muttered "Good-night" to the rest, feeling very much like a lamb being led to the slaughter.

He was led to a small room beneath the roof of the house. The ceiling sloped upon both sides to within two feet of the floor. There was but one window, at the north end, secured by a stout oaken shutter fastened with padlock and chain.

"Thar's your bunk, stranger," said James, pointing to a low bed. "If you want anythin' in the night just pound on the floor, and some o' us'll be sure to hear ye."

Abner Moncton sat down upon the bed when he was left alone, and his reflections were gloomy enough.

That he had fallen into the hands of robbers, or even worse, he felt assured. The young woman's warning could not be mistaken.

There was only one frail door to oppose them. That passed he was helpless, for the heavy rain had thoroughly wetted his pistols, and he had no dry powder with which to renew their charges. He had several thousand dollars upon his person, and he knew that many a life had been taken for one-tenth part of that sum.

He arose and tried the shutter. It was firmly secured, and could not be forced without alarming those below. He could now only wait in hopes of the appearance of the young woman. And yet, how could she aid him?

Truly the prospect before him was a gloomy one.

The minutes dragged by, and seemed hours. Only for the slow wasting of his candle, Moncton would have believed that day was near at hand, when he caught the first sounds of cautious footsteps upon the stairs.

With clubbed pistol, he stood behind the door, but this precaution was unnecessary. He recognized the voice of his friend, and opened the door.

"Hist! Not a word! There is no time to lose!" she whispered, in a subdued yet eager voice. "Even now they are preparing for the deed—to murder you as they murdered him—my poor husband! Come! You can escape from the window in

the other room! It is your only chance! One minute lost may be fatal! Come!"

While speaking she almost pulled Moncton from the chamber across the narrow landing-place, and into the other room. With trembling hands she opened the window, but unfortunately it slipped from her grasp, closing with a shock that shattered the glass. Loud voices were heard below, and then the rush of feet upon the stairs. The alarm had been given.

With one thrust of his foot, Moncton dashed out the sash, and fearing to lose an instant, jumped blindly through the opening. He fell heavily, but immediately arose, and staggered on through the night. But only for a few steps.

His right leg gave way beneath him, and he sank to the ground with a helpless groan. He heard shouts—saw dim figures with a lantern; then all was a blank.

One week later he recovered his senses, and found himself a tenderly-nursed patient in that very house.

The old woman was watching over him, and from her he learned the truth. The young woman was insane, rendered so by the cruel murder of her husband the very week after her marriage. An only daughter, they loved her too dearly to send her to an asylum, seeking by close watching and tender care to render her malady harmless.

Unfortunately she had eluded them that night, and thus Abner received a broken leg. As for the drugged whisky, the little paper had contained the only morsel of white sugar in the house, which was given the stranger as an especial mark of honor.

Since that day Abner Moncton has felt a strong aversion to all black-eyed women.

## RAILROADING IN THE WEST

When we speak of "flying like the wind," of course we mean it as a figure of speech. The wind blowing at the rate of forty miles an hour is called a gale, at sixty miles an hour a hurricane, and whenever it falls to the lot of man to ride on the wings of a hurricane, he will realize what is meant by the expression "flying like the wind." I have often used the expression, but until last Monday morning never knew what it meant. I took the 6 o'clock train out of Kansas City over the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific to Trenton, where I was to lecture in the evening. The train had no through connections, and hence was very light, with only a few passengers. Six o'clock in the morning is an early and sleepy start for any one to make.

It was not fairly daylight when we rolled out of the Central depot, and twenty miles out of the city I had hardly realized that the hazy, gray dawn had widened and brightened into a brilliant day. I was dozing, and nodding, and dreaming. I could hear the roar and feel the jar of an earthquake rumbling beneath my feet, when I was suddenly awakened by a new set of sound waves beating against the tympanum of my ear. Looking out of the south window of the car, my first impression was that another train on runners was sliding noiselessly past us over the frosty, grassy pastures. Like a catspaw, as the sailors would say, it had swept down upon us, as still and as fleet as rain-spent, drifting clouds.

Then I heard the screech of people, saw waving handkerchiefs, and began to realize that the vision had passed. Like the swoop of a bird of prey, it flashed upon us, and was gone before we could look.

"What is it?" I asked, of the brakeman.

"It's the Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific train, and they're letting out red hot, and don't you forget it."

Stepping to the window, sure enough there was another track running parallel with ours, and so the vision was a veritable train of cars, and they were outrunning us as if we were standing still.

"Why is this?" I asked; for I believe my pulse had jumped to 120 at one bound; "why is it that we are to suffer such indignity?"

"Oh, you wait a few minutes," said the brakeman. "Hall is blacking his boots. You wait till he gets fixed up, and you will hear from old '53'; wait till he gets his kitchen to rights, and you will think the St. Louis train has stopped to pick whortleberries."

I turned my head to look out of the window just then, and observed the telegraph poles passing in close proximity toward Kansas City. Gould has hitched on to another line with his engine and is taking it in, I thought, and then I noticed the forest was filled solid full of trees, and then I realized that we were "flying like the wind," and the passengers who were looking out on the south side clung to their seats and shouted through their clenched teeth.

"Oh, we are gathering them up! Old Thad is after them wide open! Oh, they are coming! Old '53' is peeking in her mail coach!" Sure enough, within six feet of us was the rear coach of that train that but a moment ago had swept past us like an avalanche. Seemingly they were coming back.

"They have forgotten something," I said.

"Yes," said the brakeman, "they had forgotten that a son of old Smoky Hall, with a gizzard full of sand, was running old '53', the fastest engine in the west, but they will remember it now."

The engine of the St. Louis train was now fallen back abreast of our rear car, and was slowly losing ground. But what speed! It smoothed down all irregularities in the track, the usual roar was drawn down to a fine whistle, and, indeed, we were then "flying like the wind." I raised the window nearest the engine and bowed politely to the engineer. He answered it with a slight curl of defiance upon his lips, and gave another pull at the throttle.

What a sight was there! What a sensation! What wild delight, that tingles every nerve—the eyes, the ears, every pore of the human form drinking in bliss. I have not an enemy on earth that I hate so bad that I would deprive him of such a sight.

When the horses are coming down the homestretch, neck and neck, you hear the patter of hoofs, the "glang" of the driver and the whisk of the cruel lash; you see the jockeys leaning forward over their horses, the wheels of the sulkies look like solid spokes, and the horses actually reaching out with their noses to gain a victory that their fleet feet will not gain them. Add to this the shouting of the crowd of people, and I acknowledge it is quite exhilarating. But let me say to my sporting friends such a scene is a funeral procession compared with this race. As I looked upon the face of that engineer, smut-begrimed, to be sure, still his white, clear-cut features were shining through it all. The blood had gone back to his heart and blanched his face; in rigid physical repose he sat like a statue, with his eyes riveted on the track. The drive wheels of his engine were solid with speed, and no motion of the piston rods could be observed except the up-and-down movement.

Perhaps I ought to say, for the information of the officers of these roads, before closing my letter, that the boys did not break any rules, I guess, in their little race. The rolling stock was in good condition, and the roadbed splendid; and the engineers informed me afterward confidentially that they only ran about thirty miles an hour, and an engineer would know better than any one.

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